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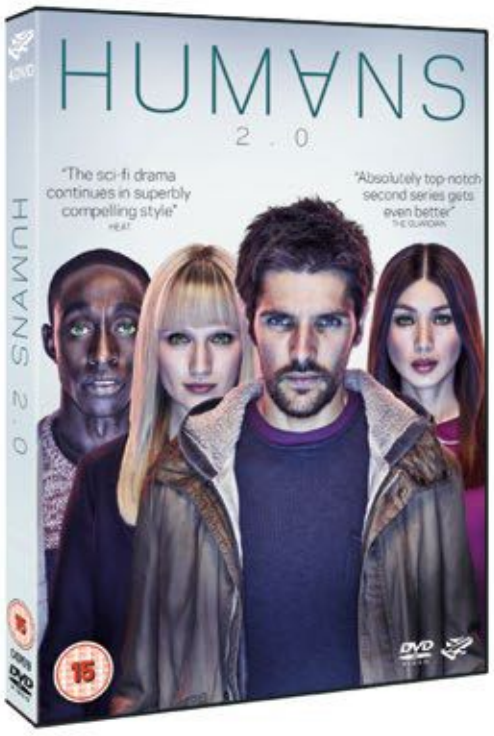
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THE MAGNIFICENT ONE

ROBERT VAUGHN 1932-2016

by PAUL MOUNT





Another genre legend has passed away, so join us as we pay tribute to the original Man from U.N.C.L.E....

"*With a modest amount of looks and talent and more than a modicum of serendipity, I've managed to stretch my fifteen minutes of fame into more than a half-century of good fortune*," wrote Robert Vaughn in his hugely entertaining 2009 autobiography **A Fortunate Life**. Perhaps the key word here is 'modest'; despite an extraordinarily varied career that saw him starring in dozens of iconic feature films and television series, Robert Vaughn, who passed away last month at the age of 83 after losing his battle with leukaemia, remained down-to-earth and self-effacing. He was equally at home amidst the glitz and glamour of Hollywood during its 1950/60s heyday as on the cobbles of Weatherfield in a three-week stint as an ageing lothario in enduring British soap opera **Coronation Street** in 2012, one of his last notable screen roles. Robert Vaughn was a man who was born to act, whose fascination with Shakespeare's **Hamlet** remained with him throughout his life and who was at enough peace with his life and his achievements to remark in his autobiography, "*If you do the thing you love, you'll never have to work a day in your life. I did, and I haven't.*"

Robert Francis Vaughn was born on November 22nd, 1932 from theatrical stock – his father Gerald Walter was best-known as a popular radio actor and his mother Marcella Francis was a busy stage actress. When his parents divorced, the young Robert found himself in the care of his grandparents as his mother travelled the United States in various touring productions. Eventually, Robert moved into in a one-bedroom apartment with his mother in Los Angeles, working to achieve a master's degree in theatre at the Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences. He earned his own acting spurs in a number of acclaimed stage productions before finally making his first screen appearances in 1955 (an episode of TV's **Medic**) and on the big screen as an uncredited extra in **The Ten Commandments** (1956). Following a short period in the US army, his career began to gain momentum and he received an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his role in 1959's **The Young Philadelphians**. The following year saw him win his first high profile role when he was cast as traumatised gunslinger Lee in **The Magnificent Seven** (at the time of his death he was the last surviving member of the original **Seven** line-up). A role in Gene Roddenberry's short-lived series **The Lieutenant** in 1963 led directly to him being offered the part which would change his life and turn a jobbing film and television actor into the star of what would become, briefly, the most popular TV show in the world. The new project was originally entitled **Solo**, loosely based on an idea developed by James Bond creator Ian Fleming, but when ill health forced Fleming to step away from the series, **Solo** began its transformation into a series called **The Man From U.N.C.L.E.**.

Born out of the 'spy movie' craze that sprang up in the wake of the success of the Bond series, **The Man From U.N.C.L.E**. cast Robert as the immaculate, urbane Napoleon Solo, an agent for the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, a covert espionage organisation operating out of a hi-tech









headquarters accessible to its agents via a secret booth in a nondescript New York tailor's store. Solo's boss Mr Waverly (Leo G. Carroll) would dispatch Solo and his Russian partner Illya Kuryakin (David McCallum) into increasingly bizarre and dangerous situations all over the world. In fact, the show's exotic locations were almost without exception realised on MGM's Lot 2, which contained any number of gigantic standing sets recreating nearly every world capital city. With nothing but their guile, wits and an array of outlandish gadgets, Solo and Kuryakin battled the villainous hordes of THRUSH (whose name only became an acronym – the Technological Hierarchy for the Removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity – in the series' many licensed original novels) for 105 episodes aired between September 1964 and January 1968. Like many pop culture movements in the 1960s, **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.** was a worldwide phenomenon that burned briefly and brightly, and both Robert Vaughn and David McCallum became international superstars whose frequent public appearances were received with hysterical fervour by their growing army of fans of all ages. But the craze for spy movies and series rapidly faded, and both stars became increasingly dissatisfied with the 'campier' scripts introduced in the second season as a reaction to the enormous success of ABC's new **Batman** TV show, which moved **U.N.C.L.E.** away from the grittier roots of its first season. Its ratings and quality falling, the series was cancelled sixteen episodes into its fourth season.

Fortunately, the end of **U.N.C.L.E.** was to be far from the end of Robert Vaughn's career. He immediately found himself cast in the classic Steve McQueen thriller **Bullitt** and director John Guillermin's 1969 war movie **The Bridge at Remagen**. He returned to TV in the early 1970s for two series of the Gerry Anderson-produced ITC show **The Protectors**, which wasn't exactly one of Robert's most satisfying creative endeavours, evidenced by his later dismissal of the show as 'tasteless junk.' Supporting roles in feature films and episodic TV proliferated throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s with movie credits including the classic 1974 disaster movie **The Towering Inferno**, 1979's **Demon Seed** and guest shots in TV series such as **Columbo** and **Hawaii Five-O**. In 1983, he played evil millionaire Ross Webster alongside the late Christopher Reeves Man of Steel in Superman III and was reunited with McCallum for the TV movie **The Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.**, which he described in **A Fortunate Life** as "*a mediocre reunion show.*"

Although he continued to work regularly in a stream of forgotten and forgettable low-budget movies and roles in TV series such as **Law and Order, Murder She Wrote**, and **Diagnosis Murder**, it was only in 2004 that he enjoyed an overdue career resurgence thanks to his role as wily senior conman Albert Stroller in the BBC's slick drama series **Hustle** alongside Adrian Lester, Marc Warren, and Robert Glenister as a team of unusually moral grifters working the mean streets of London. He would appear in 47 of the show's 48 episodes, and he continued to work in the UK in the comedy sketch series **Little Britain** and, eventually, in **Coronation Street**.

A gifted, charismatic actor, a family man (he is survived by his wife Linda, who he appeared alongside in a 1973 episode of **The Protectors** that he directed, and his adopted children Cassidy and Caitlin) and a committed political animal – he campaigned vociferously against America's involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s – Robert will always be remembered as the suave, sophisticated Napoleon Solo. But there was so much more to Robert Vaughn, so many layers to this fascinating, extraordinary, empathic, instinctive human being and his passing is yet another body blow to our collective memories in a year that has cruelly robbed us of too many of our heroes. To borrow a catchphrase from his **U.N.C.L.E.** days, already much-used by those mourning his passing, it seems that Channel D has been closed for the very last time.





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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 432!

I write this Editorial with more than a tinge of sadness. Yet again we start an Issue of STARBURST with an obituary of a classic icon that we have featured on many occasions within these pages. As you progress through life it does get harder to ignore the passage of time, and it can seem that you hit a point where life takes away much more than it gives. Sadly, this was another icon that I had an opportunity to work with, and get to know in the years prior to being Editor of STARBURST, whilst owning and operating the **Fab Café – Cult Television and Movie Theme Bar** in Manchester. There were three guests whose appearances cemented the success of a venue that would one day provide support for this very magazine when it had to weather the financial crisis a number of years ago.

In June 1998, actor **Gareth Thomas** opened **Fab Café**, followed a month later by a special appearance from **Gerry Anderson**. Then in November 1998, the third of the Fab trinity made an appearance that put the venue on the map, and gave us the national publicity we needed.

When I asked **Robert Vaughn** to appear at a basement bar in Manchester, it was a punt. I knew he was in Manchester, and along with **Roger Moore** he had been a childhood hero. The American counterpart to Moore's suave English gentleman persona. He agreed immediately and on Monday November 9th, 1998, **Fab Café** hosted an evening with a Hollywood icon. Only that was not the impressive part of the story. Turns out he really was an amazing guy who made time for everyone. He was old school. Treated his fans like they really mattered. When offered a posh meal, he refused and insisted we go to TGI Fridays for a burger. We spent a lot of time with him, and he was genuinely one of the most impressive men I have ever met. He made it apparent how much he loved his wife, whom he remained married to for over forty years, and remained with her until the end. It was apparent that she was the most important person in his life. Exactly how it should be.

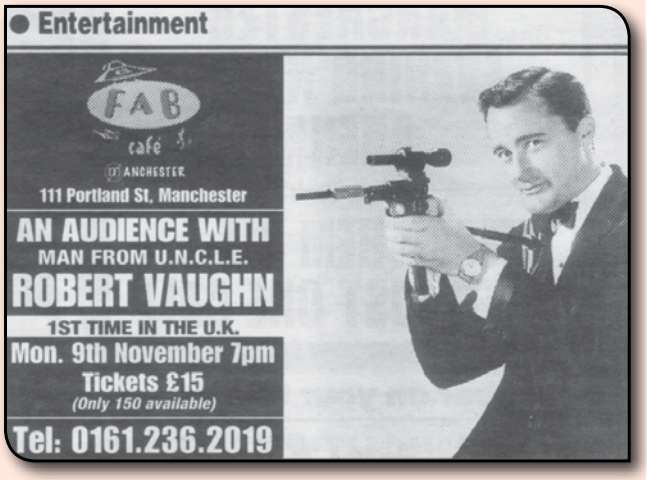
Over the last few years if you are a certain age, and grew up with this magazine we have said goodbye to many of the icons that graced almost every issue back in the '70s and '80s, but selfishly, today I feel very sad that **Robert Vaughn** has passed away. The last of the trinity that saved my ass when I really needed it. I t would be easy just to reel off the many movies, and TV shows that showcased Robert's acting talents, but that would omit the most important part of the story. He was a star that accepted fame only because it made his fans happy. So rather than dismiss his work, he embraced it. He told me how lucky he thought he was to have worked with *real* stars like Yul Brynner. Talked to me about personal losses, not the fame and fortune he had achieved. We live in an era of self-promotion via a social media world gone on full tilt. No-one has his humility these days, and it is sorely lacking in most modern celebrities. He was a great American. A Hollywood legend, and an even greater human being. He belonged to an era and an America that feels remote now, and so far out of reach...

We all hope you enjoy this Issue of STARBURST.
It's always important to us that you do,



Jordan Royce

UK PODCASTERS 2015 AWARD WINNER







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FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
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STAR LETTER

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

The pages you printed on the DESTINATION STAR TREK event were fascinating to see. This was something I had second thoughts about because it wasn't that local to me and I didn't want to go alone, but I'm now kicking myself.

The costume's you showed were wonderful, looks like a mixture of some things purchased and some things home made. To be immersed in all of that TREK goodness would be a dream! I've only ever been to a few conventions before but none which are soley about STAR TREK. All of those STAR TREK legends there, too! The group photos really appeal but I know I would want lots of them, haha!

Have they announced if and where the next one will be? I know they did one in London a few years ago. Maybe it will be our turn next over here! Even if it is somewhere further afield in mainland Europe depending on where it is, it could be a good excuse for a nice away mission somewhere different if I save up with enough time!

Roisin, from IRELAND

Well if you want to go on an away mission, nowadays there are even STAR TREK-themed cruises you can go on! Maybe that would be a good convention/holiday for you!

STRANGER IN A STRANGE MAG

Just to let you know, I truly enjoyed the DOCTOR STRANGE cover. STARBURST #429 really stood out. There was so much great information in this issue. STARBURST always gives me the needed information that allows me to be prepared for upcoming movies. I love the charcoal color of the C2-B5 Imperial Astromech Droid. Some people may have been disappointed with WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING, but I wasn't disappointed, enjoyed the Orcs and looking forward to the sequel. Your feature *Tales from the Marvel's Crypt* brought back memories when I saw the cover of *Tales of the Zombie*... which would make a great Marvel movie. During my time as a kid reading this comic book, the Zombie never interacted with any Marvel characters. The closest it came was when Marvel's Dracula went to New Orleans and detected the Zombie's presence, but they did not see each other, nor did they interact with each other. I had a blast with your issue, reading everything from Negan and his baseball bat Lucille to Dreamworks TROLLS to the SAUSAGE PARTY to the WWE Undertaker and Scooby Doo upcoming crossover! So much fun!

Herschell Gordon Lewis was a genius when it came to the mastery of gore, he will be missed. His contribution to the horror film industry is amazing, there are so many movie producers that have learned from Herschell. Aged 90 and now he is gone. RIP Herschell Gordon Lewis. Absolutely loved your DOCTOR WHO feature. Watched DOCTOR WHO when I was a young boy and it continues on to this day. What a legacy.

Paul Dale Roberts, HPI's Esoteric Detective Halo Paranormal Investigations

Ahh WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING, that was a highly anticipated movie for 2016, but turn to page 70 for our feature on STARBURST's movies of the year and find out if it made our list! And have a browse at our lengthy 2017 preview (starting on page 20), this time next year you may be writing to us again about how you enjoyed some of those films too, hopefully anyway!

Return of the SIFF

When is STARBURST Film Festival 2017 happening? I had a bad 2016 and missed all the cool stuff, but I want to go in 2017. What's the date so I can book a holiday in sunny Manchester. Is it in Manchester? If you decide to have it in Barbados or Las Vegas that would also be great.

Loved the PokeyCon. More of that, please.

Steve, VIA EMAIL

Plans are afoot, so watch this space, buddy! As a reader of the magazine, you will be sure to know about it well before the event! You can also follow SIFF on social media so you don't miss out on any updates! Twitter - *@starburstff* or *facebook.com/starburstfilmfest*



"Once again, Steven Moffat's choice of Dr. and companion was sadly misplaced."

Winner: Nygel Harrot. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE BEST (AND WORST) OF THIS MONTH'S MOVIE / TV NEWS

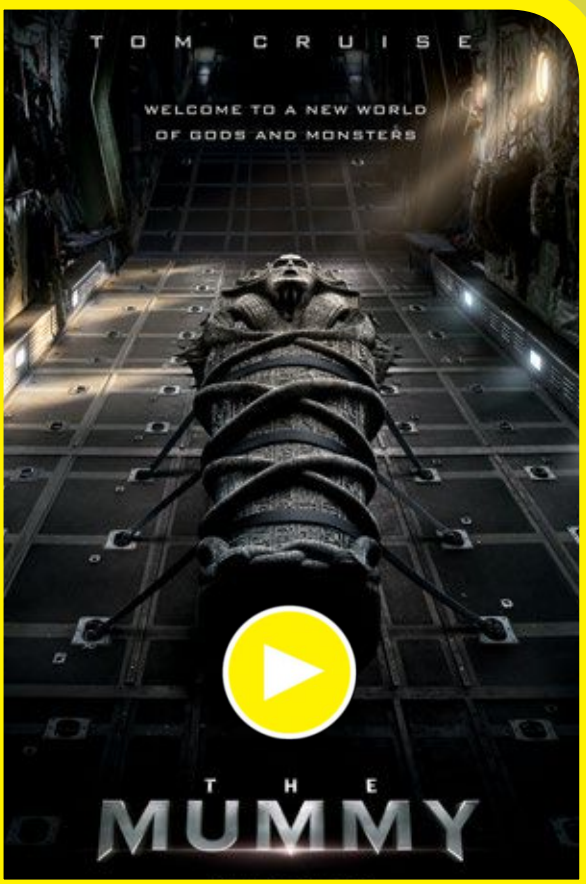


DC

Given how the next movie in Warner Brothers' DC Extended Universe doesn't arrive until next November, there's been very little DCEU news this month. That said, there has been one major story, with Ciarán Hinds now confirmed to be playing the 'big bad' of Zack Snyder's **Justice League**. The actor, best known for roles in the likes of **Game of Thrones**, **Munich**, **Road to Perdition**, and **There Will Be Blood**, will be playing Steppenwolf in Snyder's **Batman v Superman** follow-up. That particular rogue actually appeared in a deleted scene from **BvS**, although his appearance will be different in **Justice League** to what was seen in that clip, and here Steppenwolf will actually be a performance capture character rather than Hinds playing him as an in-the-flesh live-action villain. For those not familiar with Steppenwolf, he's one of the New Gods, the uncle of Darkseid, and the leader of Darkseid's Apokolips army. Safe to say, much like Ron Burgundy, he's kind of a big deal. At present, **Justice League** is set for a November 10th, 2017 release.

In other DC-based movie news, Billy Dee Williams is *finally* going to be playing Two Face… in **The LEGO Batman Movie** [see page 16]. Whilst he's best known for playing Lando Calrissian in a galaxy far, far away, Williams famously played Harvey Dent in Tim Burton's **Batman** and **Batman Returns**. Over the years, the actor has made it known that the plan was for his Dent to transition into the villainous Two Face down the line, but he'd be deprived of playing the Duke of Duplicity when Tommy Lee Jones was given the Two Face gig for **Batman Forever**. Now, though, Williams gets to go full-on Two Face against Will Arnett's Batman!

Taking the DC action to the small screen, and many fans will be ecstatic to hear that Warner Bros Animation has moved to confirm that **Young Justice** will return for a third season. The animated series proved to be a favourite of many from the moment it debuted back in 2010. Featuring the likes of Nightwing, Robin, Batgirl, Kid Flash, Aqualad, Miss Martian, Artemis, Beast Boy, Wonder Girl, and Speedy, the show focused on some of DC's famous young heroes (don't call them sidekicks!) as they looked to prove themselves to their mentors. No details are known on just when and where **Young Justice** will return, but expect to be hearing more on this hotly anticipated return over the next few months. AP



Tom Cruise is back on action duties in this revamp of the classic Universal film, the first of the new breed of horror adventures set in a shared universe. The tagline (a quote from 1935's **The Bride of Frankenstein**) seems to set the right tone for what's to come and Russell Crowe plays Dr Henry Jekyll (actually *not* one of the original Universal Monsters). It's interesting to see that in the trailer, the mummy herself, played by Sofia Boutella, is not being kept under wraps.

Directed by Alex Kurtzman and written by Jon Spaihts (who did an ace job bringing **Doctor Strange** to the screen), expect Egyptian curses aplenty when **The Mummy** opens on June 9th.



MARVEL

In a relatively quiet month for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the only real MCU news centres on **Spider-Man: Homecoming** and **Black Panther**. Where **Homecoming** is concerned, Spidey himself, Tom Holland, has confirmed that he's actually got a six-picture deal as ol' Web-head. That contract includes a trilogy of solo movies and three appearances in *other* films. Whether those other movies will be **Avengers** efforts or appearances in other heroes' adventures remains to be seen. Additionally, the love interest for Peter Parker in **Spider-Man: Homecoming** is now believed to be that of Liz Allan. Laura Hallier has been long confirmed to play the character, and now reports claim that Liz will be the one who Parker will be making goo-goo eyes at in **Homecoming**. In comic book lore, Liz Allan was initially the girlfriend of Flash Thompson, and she'd regularly be positioned as one of the cool kids who'd poke fun at the ever-nerdy Peter Parker. Over time, Liz began to fall for Peter and the two would have a relatively short-lived relationship. Further down the line, Liz would become Liz Allan Osborn after she married the troubled Harry Osborn. To be directed by **Cop Car**'s Jon Watts, **Spider-Man: Homecoming** will swing into cinemas on July 7th, 2017.

Where the aforementioned **Black Panther** is concerned, the Chadwick Boseman-starrer has added another new name to its ranks this past month by bringing in Angela Bassett. The Oscar-nominated actor, best known for the likes of **What's Love Got to Do With It**, **Green Lantern**, and **American Horror Story**, will be playing Ramonda, the mother of Boseman's T'Challa. Following his début in this year's **Captain America: Civil War**, Boseman's King of Wakanda returns to action in Ryan Coogler's **Black Panther** on February 16th, 2018.

Taking things over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel movie realm, and **Deadpool 2** has found a new director in the shape of **John Wick** co-director David Leitch. Following Tim Miller's departure from the director's chair, Leitch was the early favourite for the gig, and now that's been made official. As well as that, Fox are also looking at their options for **Deadpool 3**, with a *different* director being sought for that threequel. Where that film is concerned, the current word is that it will heavily feature the X-Force team, with two members of that group, Cable and Domino, to début in **Deadpool 2** ahead of a fully fleshed-out team in **Deadpool 3**. With Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick again on writing duties, and with Ryan Reynolds returning as the Merc with a Mouth, **Deadpool 2** is currently set for a March 2018 release.

Whilst some fan favourite mutants will be appearing in **Deadpool 2**, Fox also have their plate full with the next **X-Men** movie. Currently untitled, it's recently been reported that the follow-up to this year's **X-Men: Apocalypse** will be based around the long-loved **Dark Phoenix** comic book arc. Of course, the whole Phoenix angle was previously seen in **X-Men: The Last Stand**, with Famke Janssen's Jean Grey being taken over by the all-powerful Phoenix Force. In **Apocalypse**, we then saw a glimpse of Sophie Turner's young Jean battling her own demons, and this will seemingly be brought to the fore in the next **X-Men** effort. Here's hoping that the Dark Phoenix ends up being the main focus of this next film rather than merely being a side dish to a larger story like it was in **The Last Stand**. Given how the Phoenix is seen as one of the most powerful characters in the entire Marvel comic book world - having actually defeated the world-eating Galactus at one point in time - it's about time that this character and story is given the full spotlight. In the comic realm, the Phoenix is a cosmic force from deepest space, and with previous rumours claiming that the next **X-Men** movie could well be heading to the stars, that opens up the possibility to use that as a way to bring the Dark Phoenix into the fold. With no title and no release date at this stage, expect to be hearing more on this as it develops next year.

As we were going to print last month, stories were coming out that **Marvel's The Inhumans** may not be as dead as some initially feared. After all, seeing the film pulled from Marvel Studios and Disney's upcoming slate was certainly a worrying sign. Now though, it's been confirmed that **The Inhumans** is indeed happening, and that it will be getting the unique treatment of being a TV series that's heading to the big screen. IMAX Corp., Marvel Television and Disney|ABC Television Group have revealed that they're working on a live-action series that will exclusively premiere in IMAX commercial cinemas. This unique arrangement will see the first two episodes of **The Inhumans** run exclusively in IMAX for two weeks from September next year, and ABC will then début the weekly episodic series with additional content that will only be available on the network. This is the first such agreement of its type, and it's certainly something that could offer up plenty of possibilities down the line for other similar deals to be struck.

And while the concept of Inhumans has already been introduced on **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.**, so too has the Robbie Reyes version of Ghost Rider. The man behind that depiction of the Spirit of Vengeance, though, has this month confirmed that there have already been official talks of spinning off Ghost Rider into his own vehicle down the line. Actor Gabriel Luna revealed that "*there's definitely deals in place for that potential*" where a Ghost Rider TV

MONSTER HUNTER



While we await **Resident Evil: The Final Chapter** (released in February), director Paul W. S. Anderson is preparing his next project, an adaptation of Capcom role-playing game **Monster Hunter**. As well as unveiling a concept picture, Anderson revealed in an interview, "*The central characters are very relatable American characters. You take a person from the ordinary world who thinks they're in a dead end job, they have no future, they feel like their life's a failure, it's going nowhere, like Keanu Reeves in* ***The Matrix****. It's about a normal American who gets dragged into this parallel world, this Monster Hunter world. Then eventually the parallel world ends up coming to our world. So you have the creatures from the Monster Hunter world invading our world.*"

Although there's no indication as yet of when the film is expected to shoot or hit screens, the rights have been secured from Capcom and Anderson is hopeful that he'll have another hit franchise on his hands to replace **Resident Evil**, adding: "*It's definitely intended to be a franchise, because the movie starts in our world, and then it goes to the Monster Hunter world, and then the final act comes back to our world, and it's basically this epic battle in and around LAX. Then at the end we're suddenly confronted with the fact that the mythological creatures of our world have come back to wreak vengeance. So we definitely have the second film where that would be planned out.*"

show, Netflix series, or even movie are concerned. For now at least, the Rider will be calling **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** home, but that could easily change in the future.

Remember that Cloak and Dagger series that's in development? No? Well it is, and now the show has brought in a showrunner. Overseeing **Marvel's Cloak and Dagger** will be Joe Pokaski, likely best known for his writing work on **Marvel's Daredevil**. Additionally, the series has now found a home at the Freeform network in the US, although the show has been pushed back a little from its planned airing date. Originally set for the first half of 2018, **Marvel's Cloak and Dagger** will now premiere in Winter 2018. Unlike regular TV series, though, this upcoming effort has already been confirmed for a full series order rather than going the traditional 'pilot' route. The current blurb on the show reads: '*The series will focus on Tandy Bowen and Tyrone Johnson, the eponymous Cloak and Dagger, as they learn to use their newly acquired super powers while also falling in love with each other. Cloak is capable of teleportation through the "dimension of darkness" but can also leave foes stranded in the other world as well. Dagger has the ability to create light daggers with her mind, which she can control as well. Her daggers are capable of both draining life from their targets or healing them.*' AP

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

DECEMBER 16TH - DEMONS (1985)
Produced by the legendary Dario Argento and directed by Lamberto Bava (son of Mario), this cult shocker takes place at a cinema where an evil presence begins to possess the audience. A standout (well, fun) performance by Bobby Rhodes ("Smash everything!") as Tony the Pimp makes it worth watching alone.

+++

DECEMBER 18TH - BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB (1971)
This latter-day Hammer shocker is actually based on the Bram Stoker tale **The Jewel of Seven Stars** and stars buxom beauty Valerie Leon (perhaps best-known as the 'Hai Karate' girl - ask your dads), Andrew Keir (**Quatermass and the Pit**) and a severed hand. Director Seth Holt died on set a week before the end of the shoot, which was completed by Hammer head Michael Carreras.

+++

DECEMBER 21ST - HONEYMOON (2014)
Harry Treadaway and **Game of Thrones**' Rose Leslie ("You know nothing, Jon Snow") play newlyweds whose romantic getaway becomes a nightmare when the bride begins to behave erratically, which may well be caused by something out of this world.

+++

DECEMBER 24TH - DONNIE DARKO (2001)
If you're too excited about the annual visit by the jolly fat man in red, here's a perfect way to bring in the Yuletide morning. Richard Kelly has yet to top this bold début, which stars Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal, Drew Barrymore, Patrick Swayze and a giant rabbit called Frank. A twisted tale of hallucination, psychosis, and time travel, it's unmissable (well, in the theatrical version, the less said about the **Director's Cut**, the better).

+++

JANUARY 8TH - FRANKENSTEIN'S ARMY (2013)
As bonkers as they come, this found footage-style shocker is all kinds of fun. **Frankenstein's Army** contains reanimated Nazis, stitched together (in a rather steampunk fashion) by a descendent of Victor Frankenstein.

+++

Fans of **Star Trek** will be pleased to know that both **Deep Space Nine** and **The Original Series** will be joining the Horror Channel roster this month. **DS9** screens from the very beginning, starting on December 19th. **The Original Series** picks up from Season Two on January 1st, a great way to live long and prosper into the New Year!

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

DETECTIVE PIKACHU

Following the film being announced earlier this year, Legendary Entertainment's **Detective Pikachu** has found itself a director. Rob Letterman will be helming the big screen live action **Pikachu** picture, with Letterman directing a screenplay from Nicole Perlman and Alex Hirsch. Letterman is best known for the likes of **Shark Tale**, **Monsters vs. Aliens**, and **Goosebumps**.

Detective Pikachu is a relatively new character to the Pokémon world, and comes in the aftermath of the huge success of this year's **Pokémon Go**.

All that we know right now about **Detective Pikachu** is that it will follow the titular character as he attempts to solve various mysteries in a live action setting. Universal Pictures will distribute the movie outside of Japan, with Toho handling duties in Japan. There's no word as yet on casting or release date. AP

SNOWPIERCER

Bong Joon Ho's 2013 film has yet to officially appear in the UK (despite it being a star-studded affair and a massive critical success), and now US network TNT has officially ordered a pilot for a small screen version. The movie was actually based on Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette's graphic novel, a futuristic tale set seven years after the world has been turned into a frozen wasteland, with the remaining survivors of humanity taking refuge on a perpetually moving train that circles this icy landscape. Of course, with a mixed bag of various survivors, it's not long before familiar social themes such as class divides, social prejudice, and politics come to the fore. Announcing the series, TNT's Sarah Aubrey said, "***Snowpiercer*** *has one of the most original concepts to hit the screen in the last decade, and it's one that offers numerous opportunities for deeper exploration in a series format. We look forward to expanding TNT's relationship with Tomorrow Studios and their take on a world where humanity is pushed to the extreme.*"

The hour-long pilot for **Snowpiercer** has already brought in **Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles**' Josh Friedman as showrunner, with Friedman also serving as executive producer alongside Marty Adelstein, Becky Clements, Bong Joon Ho, Park Chan-wook, Lee Tae-hun, and Dooho Choi. Let's hope it is picked up for a full series, and more importantly, gets the movie a release over here! AP

AND FINALLY...

Ben Wheatley is set to direct Warner Bros' adaptation of the Dark Horse comic **Hard Boiled**. The 1993 miniseries was created by Frank Miller and Geoff Darrow and this version will star Tom Hiddleston, who appeared in Wheatley's last film **High-Rise**. Before that, Wheatley has **Free Fire** next March, whilst Hiddleston will be seen next year in **Kong: Skull Island** and then returning as Loki in **Thor: Ragnarok**.

+++

The Witch's Robert Eggers has been given the director's chair on a planned remake of F. W. Murnau's classic **Nosferatu**. The 1922 film, unofficially based on Bram Stoker's Dracula, was updated in 1979 by Werner Herzog, and was the subject of the 2000 film **Shadow of the Vampire**, in which Willem Dafoe played a version of star Max Schreck.

+++

Kevin Smith has left the planned **Buckaroo Banzai** TV series due to a lawsuit that MGM has filed against the original writer/creator Earl Mac Rauch and the director of the 1984 movie W. D. Richter over the ownership of the property. Smith issued a statement explaining that he couldn't continue without the original creative team on board in some capacity, stating "*This is not what I signed up for*". He did indicate that should an agreement be met between the MGM legal department and Rauch/Richter, he'd be happy to be involved again.

TTC 432 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth.

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PREVIEW

BY MICHAEL COLDWELL











AFTER THE SURPRISE SUCCESS IN 2014 – BOTH CRITICALLY AND AT THE BOX OFFICE – OF THE LEGO MOVIE, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THEY'LL BE ANOTHER. AND WHO BEST TO HEADLINE IT? WHY, BATMAN, OF COURSE!

Remember when LEGO was just LEGO? Believe it or not, once upon a time it amounted to a bunch of plastic bricks of various shapes in primary colours spread all over your bedroom floor waiting for your next attempt at a spaceship or a windmill. Or, more likely, a really tall tower that would teeter ominously until the cat brushed past and knocked it over. And were it not for LEGO's vaulting ambition, that's the way it would have stayed; we'd now be buying it purely as a nostalgia buzz alongside all those other retro toys that sell very nicely this time of year (although Stylophones seem to have taken a commercial nose-dive of late). But the LEGO Group of Denmark (motto: '*only the best is the best*') were having none of that. They were looking to the future, and the future was 4cm (or just over four bricks) tall with a barrel-shaped head.

The winding road that leads from your mum screaming down the stairs that her hoover's just been knackered (again) by your unloved LEGO bricks to the guaranteed cast iron box office behemoth that is *The LEGO Batman movie* can be traced back to the day in 1978 when a tiny addition to the LEGO product range was released with very little fanfare: mini figures. But this was no plastic trifle; by adding little people to the mix, be it construction workers, crane drivers, pirates or astronauts, the possibilities of narrative play were massively expanded. Suddenly, kids were actually putting LEGO back in its box at night, ready for the next day's new adventure. We didn't know it, but a tiny revolution was taking place. World domination was just around the corner.

Batman has been a part of the LEGO story since 2006 when the first Bat-themed construction sets were released. An instant hit, they were followed by a number of lucrative direct-to-video movies and the hugely successful LEGO Batman series of video games. Anyone looking to understand the particular success of the licence should note the remarkable degree of flexibility DC has allowed LEGO to define their own version of Batman's universe by cherry picking a canny combination of character styles, vehicles and settings from the whole range of official TV and movie takes on the character. This has always put Batman at an advantage to other LEGO licences like *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, or *Indiana Jones* that do not have multiple iterations or 'versions' of themselves to play around with. Batman most certainly does, and don't LEGO know it; from the wack-doodle '60s TV series to Zack Snyder's current vision via the films of Tim Burton, Joel Schumacher, and Christopher Nolan, the oft-maligned creative schizophrenia of the live-action franchise has been a gift that keeps on giving to the little plastic version. The more Batmans, the merrier, in fact.

And holy cash registers, has it worked out. Fans worldwide have embraced this refreshingly inclusive approach with their hearts and wallets. But particularly their wallets. LEGO Batman is the best-selling superhero video game of all time, and every new playset has a massive built-in audience just waiting to pounce. The irony certainly won't be lost on Warners and DC that LEGO Batman, on all his exploitation 'platforms', is far and away the most commercially successful version of them all.

It's no coincidence, then that Batman was front and centre in 2014's *The LEGO Movie*, Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's CG smash-hit that lovingly celebrated all things interlocking Danish brickage with a healthy dose of self-deprecation. LEGO's first excursion into theatres told the tale of Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt), one of those unassuming 1978 barrel-headed construction workers, as he battles to stop an evil Vader-style tyrant hell bent on sucking all the fun out of LEGO playtimes by gluing all the bricks together. The film was expected to do very well, yet still surpassed industry expectations with a whopping $469 million worldwide take from a production budget of just $60 million; enough money, we estimate, to purchase one each of the current range of Star Wars LEGO kits (excluding the Millennium Falcon).

Parents dragged along to *The LEGO Movie* wearing teeth guards in expectation of a thinly-disguised marketing exercise were pleasantly surprised to discover just how funny, clever and sharp Lord and Miller's movie actually was. Here was a film unafraid to depict the kids' toy range it was trying to flog being hijacked by an uncool grown-up who glues his giant LEGO city together while telling his poor son to keep his hands off. Whether it's your mate's 100% accurate LEGO baseball stadium or that bloke at work with a photo of his giant LEGO Optimus Prime pinned to his PC monitor, the urge to smash these lonesome follies to bits and turn the rubble into a really, really tall tower for the cat to knock over is all too human. And LEGO agreed; the first movie didn't just acknowledge this impulse but celebrated it, doing the brand no harm whatsoever in the process. Another psychological slam-dunk for those devious toy technicians from Denmark. Will they ever mess up?

Probably not with *The LEGO Batman Movie*, the inevitable follow-up (but note: **not** sequel) to *The LEGO Movie*, with Lord and Miller back as producers and Chris Miller, animation co-director on the first film, taking over the director's chair. One of the plus points of the first film for adults was the pleasingly old school stop-motion 'look' Miller and his animation team achieved, a retro approach that incorporated CGI with real LEGO sets to achieve a remarkable degree of visual depth. This approach is carried over to the new film, the characters retaining that home-grown jerkiness we associate with stop-motion.

Talking of which, Miller learned his trade on Adult Swim's unforgettable *Robot Chicken* lampoon series, where he served as a producer and director for three seasons. There are many theories as to why George Lucas finally let go of the *Star Wars* franchise, but if any one thing prompted him to make that call to Disney, it was *Robot Chicken's* lacerating *Star Wars* specials, which didn't so much poke fun at his beleaguered prequels as roast them over a hot spit and dance upon their smoking ashes. If you detected some of that brand of humour in the first LEGO movie, expect even more this time around, not least at the expense of the live-action Batman franchise's stop-start history. We've already seen Alfred reminding Batman that talking to a portrait of his dead father has been done loads of times before and proving it by wearily reciting all the (real) years the live-action films have re-staged that moment. Some might say that this level of self-awareness can be a double-edged sword for a major character licence, but not here, it seems. LEGO Batman's free pass to roast his humourless live-action counterpart appears to have tapped a veritable gold mine of laughs, putting major smiles on the faces of fans and buying Warners and DC some welcome kudos along the way.

The script for *The LEGO Batman Movie* comes courtesy of Seth Grahame-Smith, who takes sole writing duties after the first movie's four-pronged committee approach. Best known for his novels *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* (both of which have been adapted into movies), Grahame-Smith also wrote the screenplay for Tim Burton's underwhelming version of *Dark Shadows* (2012), although we don't blame him for that. With an evident love of Gothic horror and a knack for barbed parody, we're keeping our fingers crossed he brings plenty of that to the party and steers clear of the saccharine cheesiness that undid *The LEGO Movie's* live-action finale featuring 'Man Upstairs' Will Ferrell.

As for the story Grahame-Smith will be telling, Warners has kept it under wraps as best they can, but that didn't prevent Lord and Miller letting slip earlier this year that the new movie will















deal with Batman's inner life as a frustrated artiste. Translation: major laughs at the expense of the Nolanesque pomposity that now defines the DC Universe Batman. Expect loads of action, too - and not just from Batman's usual Gotham posse but from the rest of the Justice League, who can be seen alongside him in the trailer. In a nice bit of symmetry with *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, the LEGO Superman looks pretty cross to be playing second-fiddle to the Caped Crusader. Let's hope he at least gets a nude bath scene with the LEGO Lois Lane.

Back as the voice of Batman is *Arrested Development*'s Will Arnett, whose growling one-liners in the first film pretty much stole the show from under Chris Pratt's nose. Joining Arnett on voice duties are *The Hangover* trilogy's Zach Galifianakis as The Joker, Billy Dee Williams (Lando!) as Two Face, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* star Michael Cera as Robin, *Daredevil*'s Night Nurse herself Rosario Dawson as Batgirl, Ralph Fiennes as Alfred and – most importantly for readers of STARBURST – pneumatic chanteuse Mariah Carey as the Mayor of Gotham City. Rumours of a Ron Perlman voice cameo proved to be just that, but we're betting Mariah will do something ground-breaking with the Mayor to banish all thought of the mega-jawed *Hellboy* star in the role. And anyone pining for Chris Pratt, as opposed to pratting for Chris Pine, will be pleased to know he's got loads of other films coming out in 2017. As has Chris Pine.

In case you hadn't noticed, we're in something of a Batman golden age right now. *The LEGO Batman Movie* lands hot on the heels of Ben Affleck's take on the Dark Knight making a strong impression in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* as well as cameoing (less impressively) in David Ayer's *Suicide Squad*. With a swift return in next year's *Justice League* and a solo movie already gearing up, it's looking like Affleck's version may even stick around for a while. Meanwhile, the non-LEGO Batman game licence continues to go from strength to strength, courtesy of the award-winning *Arkham* series, while the highly regarded and long-running DC Animated Universe incarnation, featuring the voices of Kevin Conroy as Batman and Mark Hamill as the Joker, has now morphed into a series of one-off feature adaptations of the graphic novels, the latest being this year's *Batman: The Killing Joke*, based on the 1988 Alan Moore/Brian Bolland classic. Not to be out-punned, 2016 has also seen legendary 1960s TV stars Adam West and Burt Ward back in stoic vocal form for the animated caper *Return of the Caped Crusaders*, a gleeful celebration of the classic show tinged with the darkness of the modern version.

Bat overkill? We're not hearing any complaints, although given the sheer number of bats flying over our heads right now, some black sacks and shovels wouldn't go amiss.

As for the future, that's got little round knobbly bits on it, too. *The LEGO Batman Movie* is the first of a three-picture pipeline of LEGO features that the Warner Animation Group has lined up, the next being *The LEGO Ninjago Movie*, which is based on the popular ninja warrior playsets of the same name. Will Batman be gate-crashing that party too? We'll find out in September 2017, which, even with our terrible maths, makes for two LEGO movies in one year. With the Ninjago characters far less enshrined in the collective psyche, we'd be surprised if it manages the same kind of box office as Batman, but this is LEGO we're talking about they've crunched their numbers; the ninjas will still prevail.

One movie that will certainly hit parents where it hurts most comes along in February 2019 when the first official sequel to *The LEGO Movie* lands. Currently known as *The LEGO Sequel* (we see what they did there), it will reunite all of the stars of the first film while throwing in a whole toy store's worth of new characters. Even so, expect Batman to pop up and steal the show yet again.

But first, to the Batcave for what promises to be an irreverent, affectionate and action-packed solo outing for the Caped Crusader. If the colour-drained gloom of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* left you feeling a bit down, this could be just the tonic. After all, there's more than one way to skin a bat.

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE assembles at cinemas on February 10th, 2017.

2017 PREVIEW

This year has been a terrible one for many. We've suffered the loss of great artists such as David Bowie, Alan Rickman, and Prince and the commercial dive-bombing of several high profile movies, not to mention a political landscape that almost makes us happy to watch Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice again. As we prepare to draw a line under our annus horribilis, let's see what the next twelve months have in store for us...

MOVIES

JANUARY

ALSO RELEASED:

Split

T2: Trainspotting

Principle

Virus of the Dead 2: Uploaded

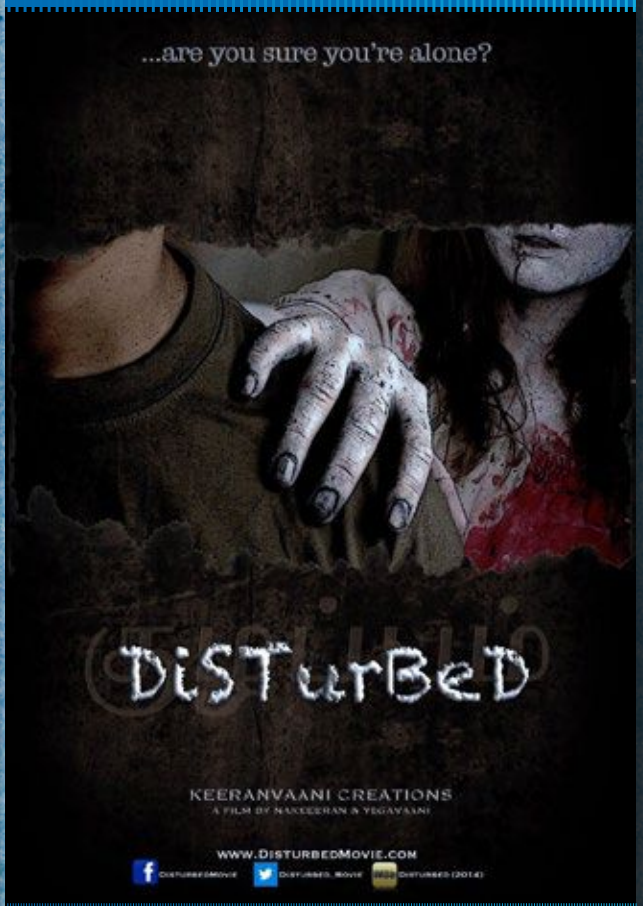


UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS

Once again, Kate Beckinsale's Selene is back to kick all kinds of monstrous behinds. This time, the small job at hand is finally putting an end to the eternal war between Lycans and Vampires, regardless of the cost. Oh, and these warring factions are all after Selene's blood – hence the title! Fear not, for in her battle she'll be joined by Theo James' David, last seen in 2012's **Underworld: Awakening**, and his pops, Charles Dance's Thomas. Rumoured to be the final instalment in the **Underworld** franchise, Anna Foerster makes her feature film directorial debut here. AP

DISTURBED

Little is yet known about Yegavaani Parmason's low budget début feature, but what we do know is undoubtedly intriguing. Following a major car accident and a spell in hospital, a man returns home where he begins to experience strange, paranormal occurrences. Looking very much like a psychological thriller with supernatural elements, **Disturbed** could well be a film that garners a reputation through word of mouth. We recommend you keep an eye out. JT



GOD PARTICLE

Earlier this year, producer J. J. Abrams surprised us with **10 Cloverfield Lane**, a sort-of sequel to his 2008 monster movie **Cloverfield**, telling an entirely different story set in the same universe. He's done it again with **God Particle**, in which a team of astronauts mess about with a particle accelerator, to predictably disastrous results.

Remember the satellite that falls from the sky and awakens the **Cloverfield** monster? It's these idiots' fault. They also end up fighting for their own lives when reality goes awry. Directed by Julius Onah, **God Particle** stars Daniel Brühl, Elizabeth Debicki, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Chris O'Dowd. KM

FEBRUARY

ALSO RELEASED:

Films Confiscated from a French Brothel

The Space Between Us

Rings



RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER

Whilst we've all been burned by 'final' franchise entries before – most notably **Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter** being followed by a further six films, a crossover with Freddy Krueger, a remake, and now *another* reboot on the way – this next **Resident Evil** outing is definitely, definitely, definitely the last for the series (honest!). Milla Jovovich's Alice will be going back to Raccoon City for one last battle against the Umbrella Corporation and its gnarly creations. Helping out with the job at hand will be Ali Larter's Claire Redfield, as Paul W.S. Anderson's video game-driven franchise comes to a close. AP



ABANDONED DEAD

Lumbered with the night shift in a run-down inner city medical clinic, security guard Rachel (ubiquitous indie horror girl Sarah Nicklin) soon finds she has more to contend with than creepy shadows after discovering the place has a suspiciously high turnover of nocturnal staff. Aided by a detective and a psychiatrist, she must investigate a mystery that leads back to a secret from her own past, while also aligning with the spirits of the dead to gain vengeance on the mad doctor who killed them in his determined and demented quest for immortality. AM



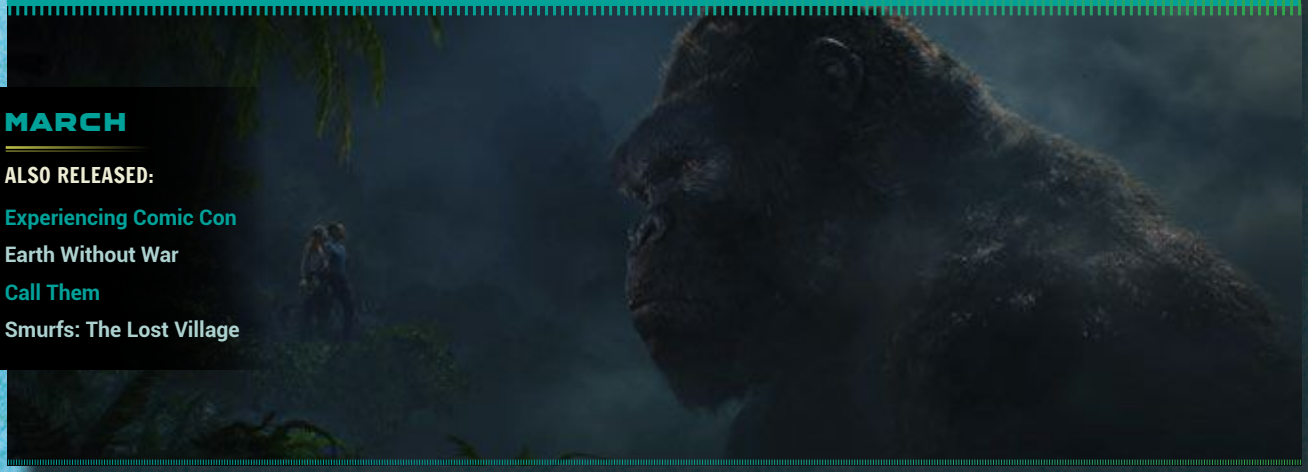
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2

The sequel to 2014's well-received Keanu Reeves renaissance action thriller finds Wick in Rome, facing off against numerous other deadly assassins. Will Baba Yaga survive this time round? Probably, given a third film is already in the works. **Chapter 2** has returning survivors of the first movie's bloodshed in Ian McShane, Lance Reddick, and John Leguizamo. New faces include cult hero David Patrick Kelly, Ruby Rose and Common, here playing the head of a female mobster's security team. Expect balletic violence and a little bit more depth for Reeves' titular hitman. JE

KONG: SKULL ISLAND

Because there aren't enough cinematic universes, we're now getting a franchise mashing up **King Kong** and **Godzilla**. But before the titanic beasts are pitched against each other in 2020, here comes cinema's first take on the iconic ape since Peter Jackson's 2005 effort.

Helmed by Jordan Vogt-Roberts, this is set in the 1970s and follows an expedition to an uncharted island – actually Kong's turf. Tom Hiddleston stars as the SAS officer who leads the team, with Oscar-winner Brie Larson by his side as a photojournalist. Also risking primate-themed fate are Samuel L. Jackson, John Goodman, and Toby Kebbell. KM



MARCH

ALSO RELEASED:

Experiencing Comic Con

Earth Without War

Call Them

Smurfs: The Lost Village

THE TOYMAKER

A book of magic containing a spell to bring objects to life ends up in the hands of toymaker Amos after the murder of a rogue Nazi officer who stole it from his power-hungry colonel. Experimenting with the book's power, he brings to life his vast assorted collection of vintage dolls and handmade toys, but is soon betrayed and taken by the SS. However, the toys and dolls are having none of this, and set out to rescue their master from the mad colonel and bring brutal vengeance upon the Nazis. AM



FREE FIRE

Over the past few years, Ben Wheatley has been steadily establishing himself as one of the most interesting and prolific directors in British genre cinema. His latest effort, **Free Fire**, will hopefully join the likes of **Sightseers** and **High-Rise** as another movie not to be missed.

Set in the '80s, it's a tense thriller which sees an arms deal in a warehouse going sour, leading to a full-on shootout. A bit **Reservoir Dogs**, then? The gang of no-gooders includes Brie Larson, Sharlto Copley, Armie Hammer, Cillian Murphy, Jack Reynor and Wheatley regular Michael Smiley. KM

LOGAN

Hugh Jackman's back... but make the most of it, for *Logan* is the final outing for Jackman as everyone's favourite furball. Pulling inspiration from Mark Millar's fan favourite *Old Man Logan* comic book arc, James Mangold's follow-up to 2013's criminally underrated *The Wolverine* will see a weary Wolverine battling with his own demons and ever-failing powers in a post-apocalyptic world. Aided by Sir Patrick Stewart's ailing, brittle Professor X, Wolvie's apparent last stand will see him shield a young female clone of himself from the clutches of the nefarious Essex Corp. and the Boyd Holbrook-led Reavers. AP



DEMON HUNTER

Seemingly taking inspiration from **Buffy The Vampire Slayer**, with a little of Alice from the **Resident Evil** franchise thrown in, **Demon Hunter** follows young woman Taryn Barker as she, well, hunts demons. Grounding fantastical stories by blending them with real-life drama is nothing new, so Zoe Kavanagh's début feature does have some work to do to find its market. But the trailer is slick and intriguing, with some strong visuals which makes us confident this could be a break-out hit in 2017. JT





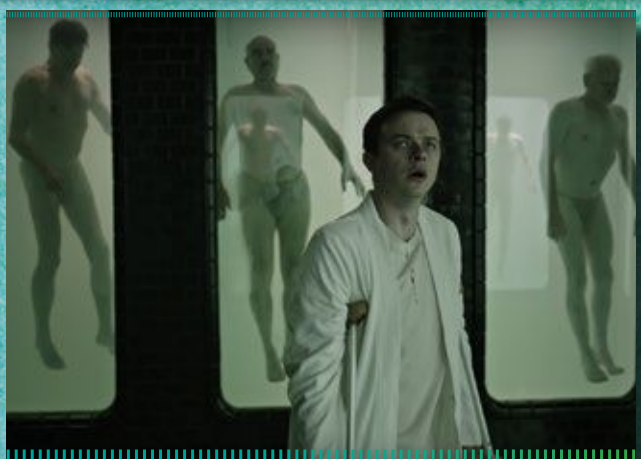
POWER RANGERS

It's morphin' time – again! The original Power Rangers dominated TV screens as teenage martial arts experts Jason, Zack, Billy, Trini, and Kimberly channeled their inner spirit-dinosaurs and generally kicked putty ass in colour-coded unison. Originally, the news that the series was set for a reboot didn't exactly break the Internet, but the trailer promises a more sophisticated premise aided by a $150 million budget. Elizabeth Banks joins a cast of newcomers as arch baddie Rita Repulsa, so it's possible that the appeal of '90s kid nostalgia could lead to the surprise hit of 2017. Go Go Power Rangers, etc. TH

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

It's a tale as old as time, but that hasn't stopped Disney from pulling out the big guns for a live action retelling of one its most enduring classics. Emma Watson and Dan Stevens play the titular characters, with support from Luke Evans, Josh Gad, and Emma Thompson. The trailer amassed over 91 million views within 24 hours, besting **The Force Awakens**' record. First glimpses show that CGI has done justice to fan-favourites Lumiere, Cogsworth and Mrs. Potts, suggesting audiences are likely to RSVP in droves to the familiar invitation of 'Be Our Guest'. TH





A CURE FOR WELLNESS

Director Gore Verbinski is capable of producing some utterly lovely and visual disturbing movies. His credits include the **Pirates of the Caribbean** series and **The Ring**. Looks like **A Cure for Wellness** will be a stunning creepfest, focusing on one ambitious young man's mission to rescue his boss from a European wellness spa. The entire thing looks isolating, strange and very, very disturbing. **Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets** actor Dane DeHaan will take the lead role. With Jason Isaacs playing the main antagonist and **Nymphomaniac**'s Mia Goth as one of the main leads, this looks very promising. EF

KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD

It's King Arfur, geezer, **Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels**-style. Guy Ritchie brings us another version of the legend of the round table king, this time going for grit and humour over magic and Merlin. The first of a planned series of films, it stars Charlie Hunnam as Arthur, a young man with no idea of his royal lineage until he pulls a certain sword out of a stone. Faced with great power and responsibility, Arthur decides to unite the people in defeating Jude Law's villainous Vortigern. Also features David Beckham's 'acting' début. JE



KINDRED SPIRITS

Mary is a medium who can commune with the dead and is astonishingly good at it. Too bad she's also an alcoholic and unaware of the damage her unmoderated spiritual communications have. Or perhaps Mary just doesn't care. **Kindred Spirits** imagines a world where the souls of the dead don't just come to tell the still-here that everything's fine and not to worry, but instead that they're watching us and know all the things we're getting up to. From director Bill Hutchens and featuring Laurence R. Harvey, it promises to bring the laughs from the hereafter. JE

EXCALIBUR RISING

Honestly, you wait years for a decent King Arthur movie and then two come along at once. This version sees mutable myth and sketchy history intermingle and follows Owain, the illegitimate offspring of the Welsh king Arth-yr and the enchantress Morganna, who after his father's death at the Battle of Camlann must learn how to become a king worthy of his legacy, one who will become legend. Opposing his ascension to power is Mordred, Arth-yr's other illegitimate son who also covets the throne and craves the power it could grant him. AM



GHOST IN THE SHELL

A live-action adaptation of the cyberpunk manga series of the same name (which was previously adapted in 1995 into a superlative and acclaimed anime film) follows a counterterrorism agent known as Major (Scarlett Johansson). A unique human/cyborg hybrid, she leads an anti-cybercrime task force in the hunt for dangerous hacker the Puppet Master, while the truth behind her own origin gradually comes to light. The film will explore a society overloaded by technology whose people are nevertheless more apart than ever, and the nature of true identity in a world where physical form has become increasingly adaptable and, to an extent, obsolete. | AM



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2

In 2014, Marvel expanded its cinematic universe out into space, with rip-roaring results; the commercial and critical success of **Guardians of the Galaxy** meant that a sequel was inevitable.

James Gunn's movie will see the five Guardians (although Groot's a little smaller now) search the cosmos for answers about Peter Quill's (Chris Pratt) heritage. They'll meet up with his appropriately named father, Ego, played by the legendary Kurt Russell, and be enlisted by Elizabeth Debicki's Ayesha to help out the Sovereign people.

This sounds like another big, mad heap of space-faring fun and we can't wait to get hooked back on that feeling. KM



CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS

Dav Pilkey's **Captain Underpants** books have pleased kids and big kids alike since 1997 with their silly heroics and toilet humour. With twelve books and several spin-offs now published, DreamWorks Animation is finally bringing the series to screen. Ed Helms stars as Mr. Krupp, the cruel headteacher who unknowingly turns into the superhero Captain Underpants whenever anyone clicks their fingers, while Kevin Hart and Thomas Middleditch will be George and Harold, the mischievous kids caught up in the mayhem. Nick Kroll will play Professor Poopypants, the most threatening supervillain since Ledger's Joker (well, maybe). KM

APRIL



FAST 8

Furious 7 grossed well over a billion dollars following its release last year so it was inevitable that a sequel would quickly follow. **Straight Outta Compton** director F. Gary Gray takes the wheel on this outing, with numerous stars including the Rock, Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez, and Jason Statham all set to return following the moving retirement of Paul Walker's character in **F7**. Shot primarily in Cuba and New York, fans should expect more inventive stunt sequences as the series seeks to outdo its predecessors on thrill factor alone. Scott Eastwood and Helen Mirren (yes, really) complete the cast. TH

MAY

ALSO RELEASED:
Winter Ridge



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: SALAZAR'S REVENGE

By **On Stranger Tides**, the fourth instalment in the most successful series ever to be based on a theme park ride, the adventures of Captain Jack Sparrow were getting stale. But six years later, it may be time to return to the high seas. **Salazar's Revenge** sees Johnny Depp's swashbuckler on the run from Captain Salazar (Javier Bardem), a ghost pirate determined to kill all non-ghost pirates. Kaya Scodelario plays an astronomer who teams up with Sparrow, and there are return appearances from Geoffrey Rush's Barbossa and Orlando Bloom's Will Turner. Also, Paul McCartney's in it. Because why not? KM

DIE GEST: FLESH FEAST

A horror anthology based around the theme of eating, **Flesh Feast** was put together through shorts selected from an open submission call. So, as well as some traditional horror monsters renowned for their eating habits such as vampires, zombies, werewolves and cannibals, we can likely expect some innovative ideas from some up-and-coming filmmakers. AM



ANNABELLE 2

Whilst **The Conjuring** spin-off **Annabelle** was, in all honesty, a letdown, hopes are high that this sequel-cum-prequel will be much better. Why's that? Well, largely that's down to David F. Sandberg, who helmed this year's **Lights Out**, being on directing duties here. Plot-wise, the story centres on a dollmaker and his wife, who sadly lost their daughter two decades previously. When a nun and some orphans turn up on their door, it doesn't take long before chaos and terror become the order of the day courtesy of a possessed doll – yep, that'd be Annabelle. Miranda Otto, Anthony LaPaglia and Stephanie Sigman star. AP

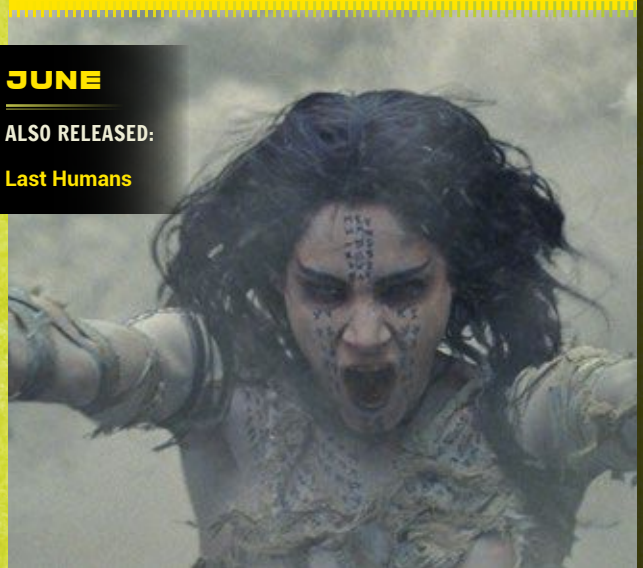
THE MUMMY

Officially launching Universal's shared universe of monster movies, this new version of the oft-told tale flips the dusty mummy's gender and features **Kingsman: The Secret Service**'s high-kicking Sofia Boutella as a wronged ancient Egyptian queen. Once resurrected in the modern day, Boutella is determined to reclaim the destiny stolen from her millennia ago. Tom Cruise also leads in a film that the makers say will retain its horror roots, as well as injecting plenty of action. More monsters are due to follow, including Johnny Depp's Invisible Man and Russell Crowe's Dr Jekyll. JE

JUNE

ALSO RELEASED:

Last Humans





ALIEN: COVENANT

Regardless of what you may think of **Prometheus**, the use of '**Alien**' in the title of a film helmed by Ridley Scott is guaranteed to get you excited. As you would expect, **Covenant**'s plot is a closely guarded secret, but a strong cast reinforced by the returning Noomi Rapace and Michael Fassbender provides hope, and confirms continuity in the story's arc. And then there's *that* teaser poster – this film will definitely have aliens! Once again, our sense of optimism far outweighs our sense of trepidation. JT

DESPICABLE ME 3

Not only is Steve Carell back to lend his vocals to Felonious Gru, but he'll actually be pulling double duty in **Despicable Me 3** as he also voices Gru's long-lost twin brother, Dru. As well as having to deal with the resurfacing of his brother, though, Gru has a problem in the shape of Balthazar Bratt; voiced by **South Park**'s Trey Parker, he's a former child star who grew up to become obsessed with the character he played back in the '80s. And, as ever, be sure to expect plenty of Minions to be involved in the action in this latest instalment of the family-friendly franchise. AP

60 SECONDS TO DI3

The flash blast horror anthology returns for a third dose of quick-fire horror madness, bringing death and suffering on a swift and agonising scale. The variation of past two collections means we'll likely be in for a similar varied assortment of shorts, and that each will end in gruesome death is the only guarantee we have. AM

TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT

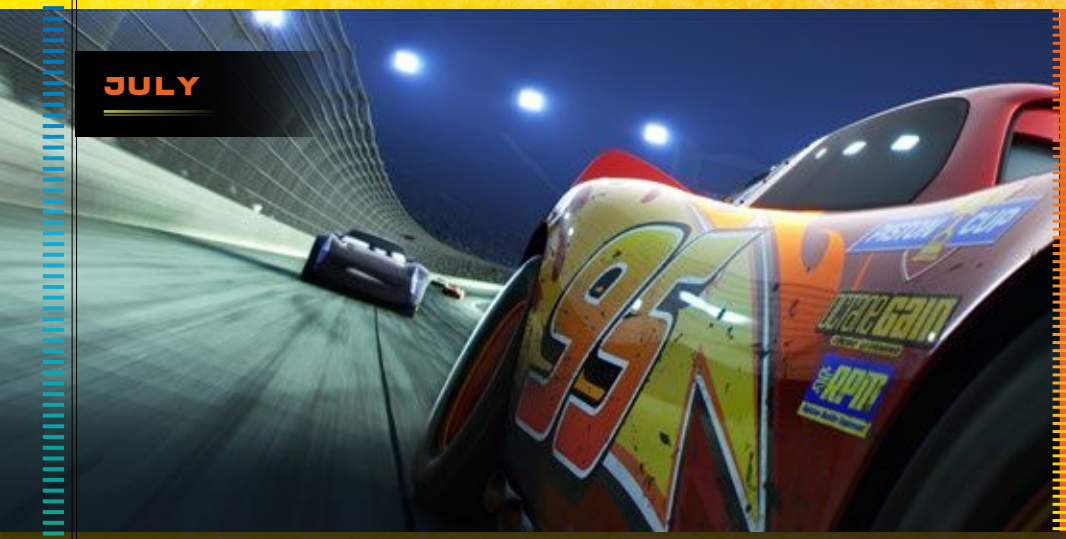
Yes, apparently there's need for *another* Michael Bay Robots-in-Disguise effort, and this time the film sounds flat-out bonkers. Whilst original franchise vets Josh Duhamel and Tyrese Gibson are returning to join Mark Wahlberg and plenty of familiar Autobots and Decepticons - including the back-from-the-brink Megatron - the oddest thing about **The Last Knight** is the fact that King Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot, Winston Churchill, and Adolf Hitler are all along for the ride. And for those clinging to memories of their childhood, brash and cocksure Hot Rod will finally be making his franchise bow here. Let's just hope he's given more to do than the Dinobots were in **Age of Extinction**! AP



WONDER WOMAN

With **Man of Steel**, **Batman v Superman**, and **Suicide Squad** receiving what are best described as 'mixed' responses, it's fair to say that the pressure is now on both Warner Bros. and their DC Films division. Having already made a huge impact in her short amount of time in **BvS**, Wonder Woman makes her solo feature début with Gal Gadot reprising her role as the titular immortal Amazonian, and director Patty Jenkins at the helm. With any hope, this could signal a revival for DC movies in general and steer the DC Extended Universe in the right direction. RP





JULY

CARS 3

Looking to return some heart to the series after last time's fun-but-shallow spy capers, Cars 3 sees Lightning McQueen (Owen Wilson) coming to terms with getting old, and having to compete against younger cars, such as the nasty Jackson Storm (boo, hiss etc). Fortunately, there's help in the form of Cruz Ramirez, a female Hispanic racing car who helps train him, presumably whilst the pair also check out each other's wheel rims. Sounds OK, but Pixar, if you could just hurry up with **Incredibles 2**, that'd be great, thanks. IR

VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS

A luscious sci-fi epic that looks to be a long-awaited return to form from the awesome-in-the-'90s Luc Besson, this film follows its eponymous peacekeeping agent for the Human Territories government as he travels all over the universe with his partner Laureline, who he constantly tries and fails to bang. The pair are sent to the intergalactic metropolis of Alpha, a continually expanding utopia that sprawls across the universe and whose inhabitants have gradually come together with the aim of mutual advancement. However, forces in the shadows are about to put nefarious plans into motion, and our intrepid duo are the only ones who can stop them. AM





THE ATTIC

Backwoods horror comes to rural Englandshire in this '80s throwback, as a quartet of American girls are stranded by barbed wire on the road bursting their tyres while taking the scenic route to a funeral. Presumably in an area with no mobile phone signal to summon assistance, they tramp through the woods and happen across the home of a middle-aged spinster who welcomes them in a suspiciously friendly manner. However, something dark and nasty lurks above them in the attic, something watching them and waiting until they're alone before making itself known. AM



SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING

For the past twelve years, our friendly-neighbourhood Spider-Man hasn't really been done justice in his own solo movies, which is disappointing to say the least. However, with Marvel and Sony finally joining forces, Spidey has now officially become part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and thanks to his big introduction in the recent **Captain America: Civil War**, audiences everywhere are now excited for the web-slinger again. With Tom Holland set to reprise the role, and tackling classic foes in the Vulture and Tinkerer, now is the perfect time to be a Spider-Man fan. RP



WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES

The third of the successful rebooted **Apes** films, at first glance, mirrors the earlier fifth and final film in the classic 1960s/1970s originals, **Battle for the Planet of the Apes**. **Cloverfield**'s Matt Reeves helms, Andy Serkis is Caesar, whilst Woody Harrelson heads the human side of things. Optimism pre-empts the third film, given that '**Dawn**' was as popular as '**Rise**'. The new film could encompass the entire legacy dating back to Heston's shock at the climax of the 1968 classic. JH



THE DARK TOWER

Recent news that the release of this Stephen King adaptation had been postponed from February to summer 2017 won't have fazed anyone tracking its near-decade in development. Originally with J. J. Abrams and then Ron Howard, it finally arrives courtesy of Danish director Nikolaj Arcel. The story of quasi-Arthurian gunslinger Roland Deschain's compulsion to reach and climb the mysterious tower of the title, it stars Idris Elba as Deschain and Matthew McConaughey as villain Walter Padick (aka Randall Flagg). With a huge and beloved literary mythology to tap into, this could well become the franchise for people who hate franchises. MC



DREAM FINDER

The dream finders were once a respected guild who interpreted the dreams of the wealthy and powerful, but with the death of their leader they have fallen from favour, and his son Antyr is bitter drunk unable to prevent them from being perceived as charlatans in a new age of enlightenment and reason. After being summoned by the city's duke, who is plagued by mysterious nightmares, Antyr's subsequent journey leads to a confrontation with a supernaturally gifted blind man with malicious intentions. Meanwhile as the shaky peace that holds the region together could soon be irrevocably shattered as the leader of a tribe of nomadic warriors prepare for war. AM

ROWENA GHOUL

Rowena Ghoul has a very special ability - she's able to reunite wandering ghosts with their loved one, allowing them to pass over. However, her actions anger a soul eater who survives by devouring the lost spirits, and the creature begins hunting her. Soon, Rowena is on the run for her life, with only a headless ghost named Ambrose to aid her. AM



AUGUST

ALSO RELEASED:

Begger Su

Knights of the Damned



CUTE LITTLE BUGGERS

After an alien ship crashes on some nearby farmland, a village in the English countryside soon feels the force of their malevolent plotting when horrifically mutilated bodies begin to turn up and several young women go missing. To fight back against the alien invaders – who have taken on the form of harmless little bunnies – the townsfolk rally around the gloriously monikered hero Melchior Haslam and engage in a brutal and bloody war against the interstellar interlopers. AM

CHIPS

To a generation in the UK, it represented a time when TV was regional rather than national. The roles of California's finest road cops (sort of) see writer/director Dax Shepard and ever-reliable Michael Pena taking over the reins of Larry Wilcox and Erik Estrada in the latest TV-to-film reboot. The success of the film will rest on whether the script can hit the heights of previous adaptations **Charlie's Angels** and **21 Jump Street** and the possibility that the new generation will have not seen any of the original shows. Older viewers might be turned off. JH

CABIN 28

Filmmaker Andrew Jones is a busy chap. His IMDb page lists 10 titles currently in development, nearly all of which he is directing. Just six, though, are slated for a 2017 release, including the intriguing **Cabin 28.** Based on the brutal and unsolved Keddie Murders in 1981, little else is yet known about the project. If Jones is planning to reveal a new theory, then one of the most infamous crimes in American history, and one still with an ongoing investigation, could soon be solved. Or perhaps not. JT



SEPTEMBER

ALSO RELEASED:

The Devil's Revenge

Animal Crackers

The Solutrean

IT

The 1990 miniseries was notable for Tim Curry's terrifying turn as Pennywise the clown. Now, Stephen King's ambitious and sprawling tale of a town repeatedly visited by a demonic child-killing force and the group of kids who fought it and, as adults, must do so again, gets the big screen treatment. Directed by Andres Muschietti (**Mama**) and adapted by the writer of **Annabelle**, this new film version should put **IT** back into our nightmares, and recent images of Bill Skarsgård as Pennywise suggest that there aren't going to be many laughs at the circus. RM

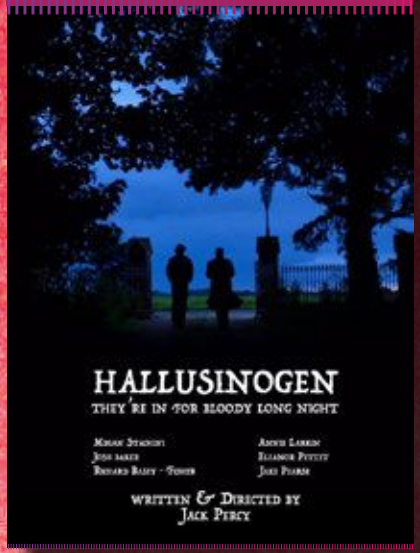
GEOSTORM

Another crack at bringing disaster movies back into fashion begins with the world being protected from the ravages of climate change by a network of satellites surrounding the planet that stave off natural disasters using geological engineering tech. But in the best tradition of nebulously defined advanced technology, something is about to go wrong. The satellite system's designer (Gerard Butler) is sent into space to fix the problem and save the world from an apocalyptic storm, while his estranged brother discovers a plot to assassinate the president, who is guarded by his Secret Service agent ex-wife. AM



HALLUSINOGEN

Describing itself as an 'avant-garde horror', **Hallusinogen** sees a group of friends have their perception of reality warped, each experiencing a nightmarish hallucination based around how they perceive themselves and what they believe others think of them, each of which also ends with a gruesome death. Mixing horror, comedy and romance, the film will question the nature of perception and reality, and whether what you see is the truth or merely what you want to believe. AM





OCTOBER

ALSO RELEASED:

Living Dead
Disgruntled Farmer
The Commuter
Devilish Deeds
The Scourge
Deathnet
Case Files
Zombie

KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

2015's **Kingsman: The Secret Service** turned out to be the most outright enjoyable spy movie in years (sorry, Bond). The good news is director Matthew Vaughn and star Taron Egerton are back for the sequel - which also includes a whole host of big names like Halle Berry, Channing Tatum, Julianne Moore, Jeff Bridges, and Elton John. What's more, Colin Firth - the highlight of the first film - looks to be back too... despite his character being shot in the head in the last movie. Let's hope this ballooned cast will improve **The Golden Circle**, rather than hinder it. CB



BLADE RUNNER 2049

Ridley Scott's 1982 adaptation of **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?** is one of the most beloved sci-fi movies of all time, so there's understandably much trepidation about this sequel. Some promise is offered by original **Blade Runner** writer Hampton Fancher having worked on the script and Denis Villeneuve, who helmed this year's remarkable **Arrival**, being the director.

Little is known about the plot of **Blade Runner 2049**, but we do know Harrison Ford will return as android hunter Rick Deckard, alongside newcomers Ryan Gosling, Robin Wright, and Dave Bautista. Let's hope it breaks new ground for the noir-esque universe and isn't just a poor replicant. KM

THOR: RAGNAROK

It's fair to say Thor's standalone movies have been somewhat overshadowed by those of his Avengers colleagues. Expect all that to change in 2017, because **Thor: Ragnarok** promises to be a cosmic throwdown of mighty proportions, befitting a storyline that dovetails into **Avengers: Infinity War**. Has there ever been a more punch-the-air-yes! MCU scenario as this: 'Thor and the Hulk suit up to kick some cosmic ass'? We reckon not. With Cate Blanchett and Jeff Goldblum as intriguing additions to the cast and a guaranteed appearance from a certain Sorcerer Supreme, consider us well and truly stoked for more Mr Thor. MC





EMOJIMOVIE: EXPRESS YOURSELF

Within your phone's messaging app is the vibrant city of Textopolis, populated by emojis who live for the moment they are selected by the user to express emotion. Each is capable of only one facial expression apart from Gene, an aberration who can alter his features any way he chooses. Determined to fit in, he embarks on a journey through the worlds of various smartphone apps to locate the mysterious Code that will fix him. From this, we can probably expect a central message that you should be happy with who you are despite the pressure to conform to what other people say you should be. AM

ED GEIN: AMERICAN PSYCHO

The story of Ed Gein has influenced filmmakers for years, providing the inspiration for some of cinema's most notorious and best loved serial killers from Norman Bates to Buffalo Bill. Several films have tried to capture the life of the man himself, without one truly standout release. The prolific filmmaker Andrew Jones, known for his straight-to-video horror films, is the latest to have a crack at a tale where fact is truly stranger than fiction. We remain hopeful, if unconvinced. JT

CARNIVORE

In an attempt to reignite the spark of their dying relationship, Dave and Abi go on holiday to a remote cottage, but things don't go well and a huge argument soon pushes them apart. However, the remote forest also hides a werewolf who has targeted the couple for its next victims, so they must stay together if they want to have a hope of survival. AM



JUSTICE LEAGUE

Is there any film due for release in 2017 that prompts a more apathetic reaction than Zack Snyder's **Justice League**? Is anyone still excited by the prospect of yet another Batman or Superman film? Does anyone care about another Flash, a Cyborg most have never heard of, or whoever the hell Steppenwolf is? Answers on a postcard. That said, here at STARBURST hope always triumphs over experience and we will greet another few hours of mindless destruction with a jaunty smile and spring in our step. We're trying, honest. JT



NOVEMBER

ALSO RELEASED:

Alice

My Little Pony: The Movie

Homeland Ashes

PADDINGTON 2

If you didn't fall in love with 2014's **Paddington**, you're not human. It combined a very British charm and wit with a poignant and progressive message about multiculturalism. And it had a bit where a bear crashed through Hugh Bonneville in a flooded bath.

We're really hoping that this sequel recaptures the same joys. Ben Whishaw returns as the voice of Paddington Bear, who, now settled in London, tries to buy a unique pop-up book, only for it to be stolen – and another adventure begins! Comedic talents added to the cast include Hugh Grant, Brendan Gleeson, and Sanjeev Bhaskar. Get your marmalade sandwiches packed. KM

COCO

'**Coco** is the celebration of a lifetime, where the discovery of a generations-old mystery leads to a most extraordinary and surprising family reunion' reads the vague synopsis for Pixar's second film of 2017 (after **Cars 3**). We do know that it's directed by **Toy Story 3**'s Lee Unkrich, tells the story of a boy named Miguel, and is centred around Día de los Muertos - aka the Mexican Day of the Dead. As that was last seen in **SPECTRE**'s pre-credits sequence, we're going to assume it's essentially a feature-length version of that, minus the shit Sam Smith song. Or indeed the rest of **SPECTRE**. Yes, we're still bitter. IR

DECEMBER

ALSO RELEASED:

The Reborn

Darkest Hour



STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII

The Force Awakens was a remarkable achievement, bringing the **Star Wars** series back to its stylistic roots and making it beloved again after the much-derided prequels. But Rian Johnson's **Episode VIII** arguably has the harder job, in that the sequel trilogy must now carve its own ground and escape criticisms of over-reliance on nostalgia.

While Daisy Ridley's Rey undergoes Jedi training with Luke Skywalker, Finn (John Boyega) and Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) will continue to fight against the First Order. Benicio Del Toro joins the cast as a new villain, and there are also roles for Laura Dern and Kelly Marie Tran. The smart money's on this doing alright at the box office. KM

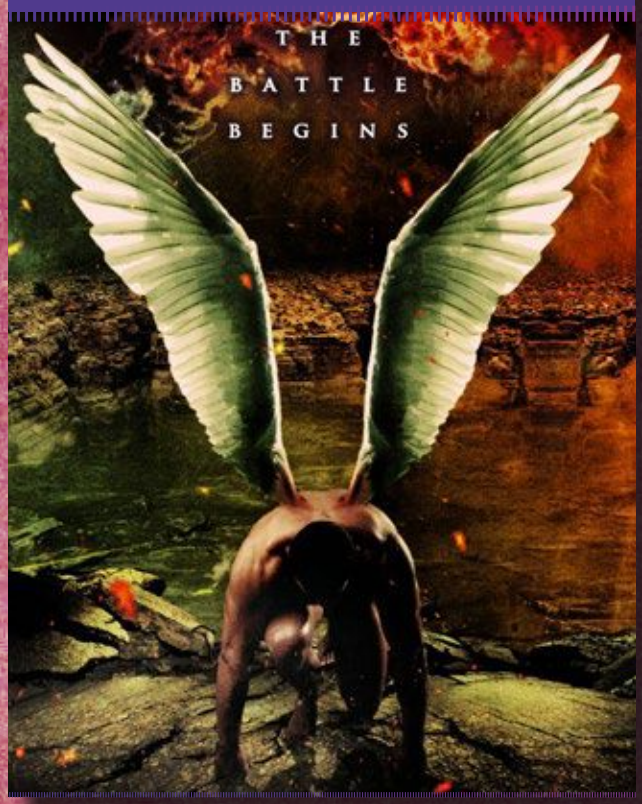


JUMANJI

The reboot/sequel/rebootquel of 1990s family favourite **Jumanji** has so far been mostly met with hostility by fans of the original and of the late, great Robin Williams. Sony will be hoping that walking franchise saviour Dwayne Johnson - along with his co-stars Jack Black, Karen Gillan, and Kevin Hart - can turn the public's opinion around. As directed by **Bad Teacher**'s Jake Kasdan, story details are currently sparse, but it is thought that the film will feature a jungle-based video game instead of the board game from the original. CB

DARK ASCENSION

Some newly dead individuals arrive in purgatory at the worst time. Heaven and Hell have both been obliterated, leaving scattered remnants of both dominions all over limbo. To prevent an all-out war between the celestial and abyssal forces, the neophyte lost souls, guided by Saint Paul, must locate the lost domain of God, and might also have to end up facing Lucifer himself. Also, did we mention that Saint Paul is played by Brian Blessed? Sorry, BRIAN BLESSED!!! AM



HADRON

In world ravaged by swarms of genetically modified carnivorous bugs, domed enclaves protect the wealthy while the rest of humanity struggles to survive. Parents leave their children to be protected in council-run shelters that house a dark secret, while scientists meddle with the fabric of the universe in an attempt to recreate the Big Bang. When a pair of telepathic sisters are targeted by the bugs, they don't know who to turn to, and soon learn that the deadly swarms are not the only thing threatening the world, and that their own emerging powers may be the key to saving it. AM

DANCE OF THE GOBLINS

Five generations after humanity was thrown back to the Dark Ages after the earth's magnetic pole shifted, the descendents of the survivors eke out an existence in the decaying rubble of what was once London. Beneath the capital's ruins, the goblins have risen from deep within the earth to claim the forgotten underground stations as their own, keeping out of sight of the humans. However, the sudden but inevitable discovery of the goblins threatens to break out into a full-scale war, each race believing it to be the only way to protect their world from the other. AM

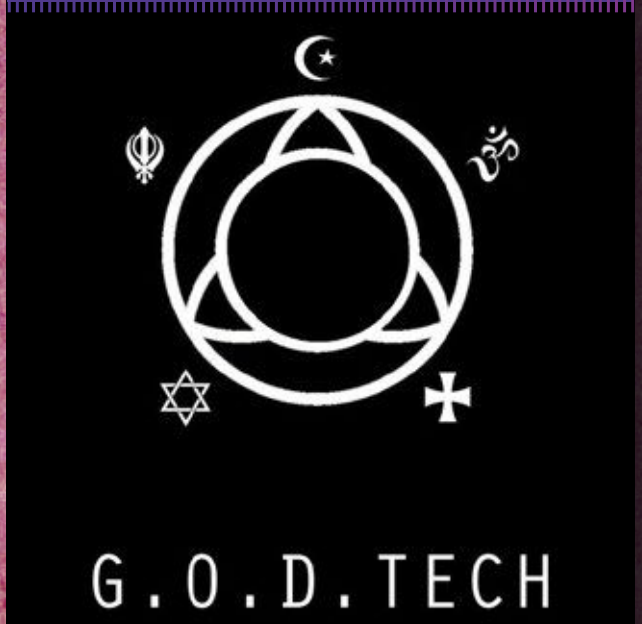
THE CURSED MAN

Alister lives in exile from life in a mental hospital, locked away from all human contact. When everyone he came in contact with died within a day, he became convinced Death was in love with him, and her jealously meant none other could even glance his way. When a beautiful psychologist starts treating him without repercussion and a face who he believed killed by his curse returns from the past he begins to wonder if he might be truly insane. Or perhaps Death has now taken on human form and come for him. AM



G.O.D.TECH

In the far flung future of 2029 the unified and peaceful world is not all it seems. The searching-for-an-equally-innocuous-and-ominous-acronym institute of Free American Technological Human Extension Research secretly control world society via mandatory cybernetic implants required for identification, trade and communication. Those who do not accept the ways of science and are drawn from the path of the One True God with false promises of prosperity are branded terrorists and mercilessly hunted down. Those whose faith and righteousness remain steadfast plan to fight against the corruption of the ways of man. Read that in as genuine or as dismissive a voice as you see fit. AM





SHERLOCK - SERIES FOUR

"*Did you miss me?*" asked the thought-dead Moriarty at the cliff-hanger ending to **Sherlock's** third series. Due to Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman both making it big in the movies, we've been waiting three years to find out what happens next.

Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss have written three new episodes of this modern-day Holmes adaptation, with two titles confirmed – *The Six Thatchers* and *The Lying Detective* – that Conan Doyle aficionados can link to two particular stories. The always-brilliant Toby Jones joins the cast as Culverton Smith, set to be one of the show's darkest villains yet. KM

DOCTOR WHO - SERIES TEN

After taking most of 2016 off (as a time traveller, he knows which years to avoid...), Peter Capaldi's Doctor returns for a third series of twelve episodes. He's joined by a new companion, Pearl Mackie's Bill, while Matt Lucas' Nardole will appear throughout the series.

Lead writer Steven Moffat has promised a lighter, more comedic tone this year, after the 2014 and 2015 series lost some younger viewers with their more adult nature. Other writers on board include Frank Cottrell Boyce, who's providing a very sci-fi-looking episode, Sarah Dollard, whose story looks to be set in Regency-era Britain, and Mike Bartlett, with a modern-day chiller. KM

MR. ROBOT - SEASON THREE

Following paranoid hacker Elliot (Rami Malek) and his quest to take down the corporate behemoth Evil Corp, Sam Esmail's **Mr. Robot** is one of the most surprising and zeitgeisty TV series of recent years.

A third season has been confirmed, and will have to address the many plot threads left lingering at the end of Season Two – not least that pretty big bomb that's about to go off. Esmail has also explained that the season will represent a different stage in Elliot's psychological journey, after his failure to separate himself from his other persona. KM

THE EXPANSE - SEASON TWO

Season Two of **The Expanse** begins moments after Season One's shocking and climactic ending. Tensions are high and the solar system is on the verge of all-out war. Followers of the book series will have noted that not all of the events in **Leviathan Wakes** have been covered, but Season Two will address that as well as depicting the action from the second novel **Caliban's War**. A new recruit to the cast roster is New Zealand actress Frankie Adams, who plays Martian Marine Bobbie Draper. Bobbie will provide a much-welcomed Martian viewpoint to the troubles affecting the solar system. CJones

MARVEL'S IRON FIST

Finally! It feels as if we've been waiting an age, but Danny Rand and the power of the magical Iron Fist are nearly upon us. Considering that Rand, to be played here by **Game of Thrones'** Finn Jones, was announced for his own series back in 2013, the anticipation is high for this one – especially due to how well received Marvel's previous Netflix-exclusive shows have been. Having been absent for years, Rand returns to clean up the streets of New York City whilst also having to battle for control of his own company. Whilst enemies promise to be close to home, Iron Fist will have some assistance from Jessica Henwick's badass Colleen Wing. AP

MARVEL'S THE DEFENDERS

Not content with individual Netflix shows for Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, and shortly Iron Fist, 2017 will see Marvel bring those four heroes together for **The Defenders** – an eight-part miniseries that will star Charlie Cox, Krysten Ritter, Mike Colter, and Finn Jones. The actual threat that brings these four together is unknown right now, just that the 'big bad' will be played by Sigourney Weaver, but also confirmed for this must-see team-up are Simone Missick's Misty Knight, Elden Henson's Foggy Nelson, Jessica Henwick's Colleen Wing, Scott Glenn's Stick, Rosario Dawson's Claire Temple, Rachael Taylor's Trish Walker, Élodie Yung's Elektra and, potentially, Jon Bernthal's Punisher. AP

SUPERGIRL - SEASON THREE

Melissa Benoist's titular Maid of Might has been as great as ever in her second season, and the introduction of Tyler Hoechlin as Superman surprised us all with how, well, super this Superman was. With recent so-so cinematic outings for the Man of Steel, **Supergirl** showed how to do the Last Son of Krypton right: compassionate, caring, likeable, awe-inspiring, and a true symbol of hope. As Kara now exists in the same world as the

likes of the Green Arrow and The Flash, and with Martian Manhunter introduced in Season One and Superman introduced in Season Two, who knows where this bright, brilliant show will go next. AP

THE WALKING DEAD - SEASON EIGHT

Throughout the first few seasons of **The Walking Dead**, we'd constantly hear whispers of just when and where comic book uber-rogue Negan would turn up. Having made an unforgettable first impression, Jeffrey Dean Morgan débuted as this most nefarious of sorts at the close of the show's Season Six, and now it's a case of what's next for the walker-centric show. Whilst Negan may not be going away any time soon, we'd speculate that the Whisperers could be brought into the fold for the already-confirmed eighth season of the show. Who are they? Oh, they're just some cult who wear zombie skin and are responsible for some major deaths in the comics. AP

ARROW - SEASON SIX

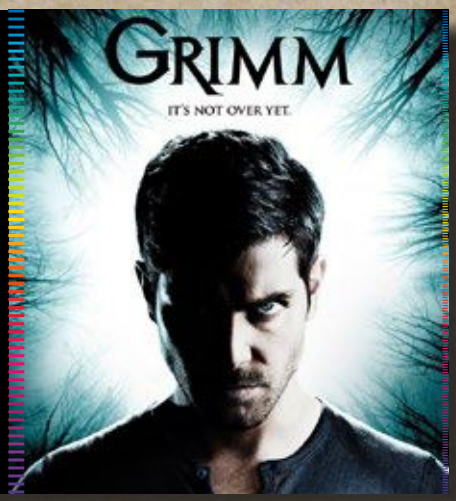
Producer Wendy Mericle and star Stephen Amell have both talked about how **Arrow**'s sixth season will be a major change for the show. Given that the first five seasons have all seen their main action accompanied by five-year-ago flashback sequences, the gig will soon be up on that front – by the end of Season five, there'll be nothing of note for Oliver Queen to flash back to. Speculation suggests that we could see flashbacks for *other* characters, whilst scaremongers out there have suggested the series may even be cancelled. If Season Six does happen (and it will!), expect the show to be have returned to a darker tone much akin to its first two seasons. AP

THE FLASH - SEASON FOUR

Where The CW's *The Flash* is concerned, literally all bets are off. What you're dealing with here is a show that's full of endless possibilities given the fact that its titular Scarlet Speedster has a penchant for travelling through time or taking a trip to alternative worlds. Your guess is as good as ours when it comes to the next season of the Grant Gustin-starrer, but, following three fantastic seasons to date, it would be nice to see Season Four not having a villainous speedster key to Barry Allen's troubles. After Season One's Reverse-Flash, Season Two's Zoom, and Season Three's Savitar, it feels like the right time to slow it down on the superfast bad guys. AP

GRIMM - SEASON SIX

From shaky beginnings that pitted **Grimm** against similar fairy tale themes in the hit **Once Upon a Time**, this dark fantasy cop show now approaches its sixth season, which is confirmed as the last one. As monster-of-the-week crimes gave way to a dense mythology and characters that developed a strong fan following, *Grimm* really hit its stride; an expanded universe that included comic books, novels, and merchandise has made it a reliable worldwide hit for NBC. The creators were given ample forewarning, so expect this to be one cult favourite that actually ends properly. JE



iZOMBIE - SEASON THREE

When comic book **iZombie** was announced as a new show for The CW, most people wondered how it would translate to the screen as a weekly series. The answer was that **Veronica Mars** creator Rob Thomas would loosely adapt the central premise and fashion yet another supernatural police procedural. Good news, then, that the finished product skewed more towards the quirky tone of shows like **Pushing Daisies** and blended the humour and heart of **Mars** with a healthy mythology and likeable characters, all of whom would be given attention, ensuring this series shambles on for at least thirteen more episodes. JE

THE STRAIN - SEASON FOUR

Based on the trilogy of novels penned by Chuck Hogan and Guillermo del Toro, **The Strain** débuted in 2014, and is back for a fourth season. Despite criticisms of an uneven tone and lack of focus, **The Strain** still managed to draw us in with its tale of New York CDC Dr Goodweather discovering that vampires are real and that the Big Apple is their next target. Mixing elements of bloodsucking classics like Stoker's **Dracula** with more modern comparisons of vampirism to plague-like diseases, the story ends, hopefully not apocalyptically, with this final chapter. JE

OUTCAST - SEASON TWO

Robert Kirkman's 'other' series, **Outcast** was renewed for a second go round before the first season had even premiered. A chilling tale of demonic possessions, it follows Kyle, a depressed young man who has struggled with the evil that has haunted him for a long time. Reluctantly partnering up with Reverend Anderson to help a possessed young boy, Kyle discovers that in doing so he might find answers to his own questions. It's in no rush to give either Kyle or the viewers answers, but fans of slow-burn horror are looking forward to this next chapter. JE

OUTLANDER - SEASON THREE

Diana Gabaldon has a lot to answer for. With eight **Outlander** novels under her belt and 2017 seeing the 25th anniversary of the first book, what better way to celebrate the popular time travel and romance fantasy series than yet another season of the TV show? Season Three will adapt

EMERALD CITY

Anyone who was traumatised as a child by 1985's **Return to Oz** or actually thinks about what happens in the colourful original knows there's plenty of mileage in a 'dark, edgy' screen version of the classic tale. That's precisely what creator Matthew Arnold pitched to NBC, which they then commissioned a full series back in 2015. Creative problems have led to changing showrunners and delays in **Emerald City** getting onto screens, but with **American Gothic**'s Shaun Cassidy as executive producer and every episode directed by **The Fall**'s Tarsem Singh, the wait is very possibly worth it. JE





PREACHER - SEASON TWO

After an explosive finale to its first season, AMC's **Preacher** is on the cusp of a new year that will make or break the series. Whilst **Preacher**'s début season was well received in most quarters, ratings weren't great and not everybody was quite sold on the Dominic Cooper-starring adaptation just yet – not us though, for the majority of us here at Moonbase Alpha were sad to see the first season come to an end. But what's most interesting about this new season is that things now seem more aligned to head in a direction that will be more familiar to fans of Vertigo's famed comic book. If so, expect **Preacher** to become even more must-see in the future. AP

the **Voyager** and **Drums of Autumn** novels. We'll see a pregnant Claire brave the whims of time in order to be re-united with the love of her life, Jamie. But first, the wild Scotsman will have to survive the Battle of Culloden. Expect blood, nudity, romance and some terrible Scottish accents. EF

FEAR THE WALKING DEAD - SEASON THREE

It looks like all things connected to **The Walking Dead** are impossible to kill, and spin-off show **Fear The Walking Dead** is no exception as it staggers and groans its way to Season Three. After a disappointing first season, it really does look like this show is finding its own pace. This shaggy tale of a dysfunctional family in a post-apocalyptic zombie-infested California enjoyed a shocking end to Season Two. It looks like nothing will be same for the main characters. The producers promise that the new season will be a tale of family reunion and slow-burn horror. EF

SLEEPY HOLLOW - SEASON FOUR

In what will likely be **Sleepy Hollow**'s final season due to inevitably plunging viewing figures following last season's disappointing run, Ichabod is now working for a secret organisation founded by President Washington to battle supernatural evil, but who have lost their way in the intervening two and a half centuries. While facing monsters from myth and legend that always seem to somehow link back to Ichabod's colonial days, he must also search for a replacement for Abbie as the second Witness, and with her face the remaining five Tribulations. AM

SUPERNATURAL - SEASON TWELVE

The urban fantasy juggernaut still shows no sign of even beginning to draw to a close. As well as the perennial one-shot monsters, Sam and Dean now have to deal with a ruthless and sanctimonious English branch of the Men of Letters, who have apparently always been around and watching but never bothered making themselves known at any point during the last decade when their help might have been useful in averting the various apocalypses that regularly loom. Also, Lucifer is back and searching for a way to restore his power. And in one episode, Dean fights Hitler. So, business as usual. AM



GAME OF THRONES - SEASON SEVEN

Queen bitch Cersei now sits on the Iron Throne, but it will likely be a short reign as various forces gather to make their way to King's Landing as the most epic TV show ever made begins its end. Jon Snow, now the King in the North, will most likely want vengeance on the woman responsible for the destruction of his family, while Daenerys finally sails to Westeros backed by the world's most vicious fighters and allied with everyone else she has wronged. And with a trio of dragons and an army of frozen undead descending upon the stricken nation, ice and fire will truly clash. AM

DARK MATTER - SEASON THREE

Since they first awoke with no memories, life has never been easy for the crew of the starship Raza, but being trapped aboard an exploding space station is a new low. With the series having already demonstrated decisively that being a featured character is no armour against permanent death, there is no way of knowing who will survive the cliff-hanger. And for those who do, it now seems that the devastating war seen in an alternate universe will soon come to pass. AM

STITCHERS - SEASON THREE

A secret NSA program uses advanced technology to insert the consciousness of neurologically abnormal student Kirsten into the memories of the recently dead and solve their murders. Although Season Two's climax left Kirsten hiding within her own lost memories, it likely won't be long before she's

coaxed back out and the ongoing mysteries can be resumed. Mysteries like what Kirsten's devious half-sister Ivy is now up to, what her father is planning, what it all means for Kristen's mother still being alive, and if anything will actually happen that doesn't ultimately have significance for her. AM

KILLJOYS - SEASON THREE

With Dutch, Our Lady of Perpetual Asskicking, now having a literal evil twin to deal with in the shapely shape of the deadly Aneela, she is all set to start a war and take the fight to the megalomaniacal Hullen before they can begin their invasion of the Quad. Also, since John has gone off gallivanting with the cybernetic badass Clara, there are now new and different directions for the show to go in. Bounty hunting, space battles, gunfights; it's all so sexy! AM

ARCHER - SEASON EIGHT

Damn it, we had something for this. Oh, that's right. Just like that old gypsy woman said, everyone's favourite hard-drinking, womanising, tinnitus-afflicted spy is right back into the Danger Zone. After resolving the cliff-hanger ending that the season also used as a flash-forward opener (which, god, is just classic Archer), we can expect more comically inept spy craft, running jokes, running jokes about running jokes, and set-ups for the end that is finally coming (phrasing!!), assuming audiences want it to be given to them (phrasing!!!!), all of which will be as much fun as a trip to whore island. Sploosh. AM

LEGION

Tangentially linked to the X-Men films, **Legion** features David Haller, the son of Charles Xavier and a supremely powerful mutant. He is also an institutionalised mental patient with severe dissociative identity disorder, each facet of his fragmented psyche in control of one of his abilities. On the verge of giving up, an encounter with a beautiful girl sets him on a personal journey of discovery and the path to realising the full extent of his capabilities and accepting who and what he is. AM

BOJACK HORSEMAN - SEASON FOUR

BoJack Horseman takes place in a world almost like ours apart from anthropomorphic animals living alongside humans in a completely everyday state of affairs. Through its eponymous protagonist, the washed-up star of a cheesy '90s TV comedy who has done nothing of worth since, the show offers a cynical deconstruction of celebrity that shows life on the other side of celebrated self-destruction, while also sneaking in a message of hope that life can be as idealistic as TV, it just takes more work to get there. AM

INTO THE BADLANDS - SEASON TWO

The post-apocalyptic martial arts series returns, and this time answers are coming. When we last saw our heroes, Sunny was in the hands of the mercenary River King and MK had been taken by some mysterious monks, so first there is the task of reuniting them before they can embark upon their quest to escape the Badlands and investigate the mysteries of their pasts. It will also be interesting to see how much the story incorporates the plot and characters of **Journey to the West**, the classic Chinese epic by which the show is *very* loosely inspired. AM



COLONY - SEASON TWO

Los Angeles is a walled-off city under the oppressive rule of alien overlords working through a military organisation of human collaborators. Former FBI agent Will has now made it into Santa Monica to locate his missing son, but reuniting the family may prove an equally daunting task, and with wife Katie a part of the resistance, the spouses may remain at odds over the best way to keep their children safe. As the human rebellion continues to brew, the show's larger mythology will be expanded, and it's more than likely that the aliens themselves will soon play a more active role in the action. AM

LEMONY SNICKET'S SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

Lemony Snicket's (aka Daniel Handler's) dark children's novels **A Series of Unfortunate Events** were previously brought to the screen in 2004 as a movie starring Jim Carrey. Now, Netflix are rebooting it as a TV show, with Neil Patrick Harris wearing the rubber nose as the villainous Count Olaf. **Supergirl**'s Malina Weissman and newcomer Louis Hynes play the tragic Baudelaire orphans, with Patrick Warburton as the titular narrator. There are thirteen books in the series, so if season one does well it could run for a long while. CB

STRANGER THINGS - SEASON TWO

The biggest surprise TV hit of 2016 is surely Netflix's **Stranger Things**, whose particular brand of sci-fi/horror mixed with '80s nostalgia really struck a chord with viewers. The pressure is on creators the Duffer brothers to match the phenomenally successful first season in the follow-up, which will presumably deal with the fallout of retrieving Will from the Upside Down and Eleven's disappearance. Winona Ryder, David Harbour and the rest of the primary cast will return, along with new additions Sadie Sink and **Power Rangers**' Dacre Montgomery. CB

HAP AND LEONARD - SEASON TWO

Jim (**Stake Land**, **Cold in July**) Mickle's **Hap and Leonard** was 2016's best kept secret, but not enough to stop it being granted a sophomore season. Based on Joe R. Lansdale's 1994 book **Mucho Mojo**, this

THE LEFTOVERS - SEASON THREE

Who would have thought that **The Leftovers** would have made it as far as Season Three? The show (based on the Tom Perrota novel of the same name) is not about un-eaten food stored in the fridge. Instead, it's about a world that has mysteriously lost 2% of the population overnight. This Rapture-like event causes world religions to collapse and new cults to be formed as society struggles with the loss. The show is noted for its scenery-chewing performances and sombre tone. Season Three promises more award-winning weeping and to continue to take this silly premise way too seriously. EF



season will see Leonard trying to clear his dead uncle's name after a child's skeleton is found under his house. If it follows the book, we can expect more bizarro characters like a retarded giant that has a habit of squeezing folks to death, and a prison inmate who insists on cradling Hap's head in his lap and calling him 'Cheryl'. CJones

BATES MOTEL - SEASON FIVE

We all suspected that Norma Bates would die in **Bates Motel**, but not before the show's end! What can we expect in the final season? With Norman's spiralling descent into madness, it will probably be the darkest yet. And we haven't seen the last of Norma, oh no, as she still exists in Norman's mind. Checking this season are new arrivals Isabelle McNally as Madeleine Loomis (a surname that should be familiar to fans of Hitchcock's original movie) and Rihanna as Marion Crane. Needing an umbrella will be the least of her worries when she takes a shower. CJones

AMERICAN HORROR STORY - SEASON SEVEN

The seventh season of **AHS** will undoubtedly follow a similar pattern to the preceding six. Fans spend months wondering what the season's theme will be, speculation goes wild when teaser images are released towards the end of the summer, then the winter months are spent arguing about where to rank the latest iteration (hint: it's 2, 4, 6, 1, 5, 3) and whether things would improve if they could convince Jessica Lange to come back. This year's theme was kept under wraps right up until the last minute, so we'll probably have to wait until September to find out what the next season has in store for us. Here's hoping it's something completely ridiculous. Who are we kidding? This is **American Horror Story.** Of course it will be! CJ

TWIN PEAKS - SEASON THREE

Twenty-six years after THAT cliff-hanger comes the third season of the greatest cult show ever™. Every single snippet of plot information is currently locked away in the deepest recesses of the Black Lodge guarded by a dancing dwarf. However, we do know that most of the original cast, headed by Kyle MacLachlan's FBI Agent Dale Cooper, are returning, alongside newcomers including Laura Dern, Trent Reznor, and Monica Bellucci. David Lynch – who briefly quit over budget concerns – has directed the entire series, which he's written alongside co-creator Mark Frost. That gum we like is indeed going to come back in style. IR



AMERICAN GODS

Neil Gaiman's mythological road trip novel is making its way to the screen, in this highly anticipated TV series from **Hannibal**'s Bryan Fuller. Ricky Whittle stars as Shadow Moon, an ex-con hired as a bodyguard by strange Mr Wednesday (Ian McShane), who may or may not be the Norse god Odin. The ensemble cast also includes Emily Browning, Crispin Glover, Gillian Anderson, Kristen Chenoweth, and Jeremy Davies as Jesus (yes, that Jesus). With such a talented cast, a gifted showrunner and some very strong source material, **American Gods** could very well be your next TV obsession. CB

STAR TREK: DISCOVERY

Star Trek finally returns to television after more than a decade. Created by Alex Kurtzman (who co-wrote the first two rebooted movies) and **Hannibal**'s Bryan Fuller, **Discovery** is set a decade prior to the Original Series and - importantly - in the proper **Trek** universe, instead of J. J. Abrams' sillier incarnation. Fuller's recently taken a step back from showrunner but remains on board as executive producer, whilst the writers include **Wrath of Khan** director Nicholas Meyer. In a **Trek** first, the lead character won't be the captain, but rather a female officer on the ship – genuinely boldly going where no **Trek** show has gone before. IR

ASH VS EVIL DEAD - SEASON THREE

An absolute gem of a show that seems to have flown under many people's radars, we strongly urge fans of the original films to give this a look. The comedy is spot on, Bruce Campbell seems to be having the time of his life, the supporting cast are playing their parts perfectly (Ray Santiago and Dana DeLorenzo are ridiculously entertaining as sidekicks Pablo and Kelly), and some of the set pieces have been nothing short of spectacular. Season Two episode *The Morgue* brought us possibly the most insane episode of anything on TV ever, and we're fully on board for however much more they can give us. CJ



SHADOWHUNTERS - SEASON TWO

Based on **The Mortal Instruments** book series, the first season of the hit stateside show was originally met with mixed reviews from critics but developed a strong following thanks to the popularity of its talented and youthful cast. Clary Fray discovers on her 18th birthday that she is a Shadowhunter - a girl born with angelic blood whose mission is to protect humans from demons. Adventurous hijinks ensue. Netflix has upped their second season order from thirteen episodes to twenty, so there's still time to learn your Jaces from your Alecs before the new series gets underway. TH

Previews written by: Andrew Pollard, Andrew Marshall, John Townsend, Kieron Moore, Tommy Hickman, James Evans, Ed Fortune, Michael Coldwell, Christian Bone, John Higgins, Robert Martin, Ryan Pollard, Iain Robertson, Chris Jackson, and Christian Jones.


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OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS FROM THE WORLDS OF DOCTOR WHO WITH KIERON MOORE



The Return of Doctor Mysterio – Final Details

We've been waiting a whole year to see the Doctor on our TV screens again, but this year's Christmas Special, *The Return of Doctor Mysterio*, is fast approaching. The BBC has confirmed that it will be screened at 5:45PM on Christmas Day. Viewers in the USA and Canada will get it at 9PM EST on BBC America and Space, respectively, while Australians have to wait until 7:30PM on Boxing Day to catch it on ABC. Some lucky viewers in Canada, the US, and Australia will also be able to see the episode in cinemas – we Brits get left out of that!

The episode will see Peter Capaldi's Doctor and Matt Lucas' Nardole team up with a mysterious superhero known as the Ghost (Justin Chatwin) and an investigative reporter, Lucy Fletcher (Charity Wakefield), to save Manhattan from brain-swapping aliens.

Munro and Mathieson Join Series Ten

After the Christmas Special, there won't be long to wait until more new **Who**. Information gleamed this month about the upcoming Series Ten confirms that the returning classic series writer is indeed Rona Munro, who scripted Sylvester McCoy's final serial, *Survival*. Her new episode, *The Eaters of Light*, is the ninth episode of Series Ten and is believed to be set in the Roman Empire.

Another confirmed writer is Jamie Mathieson, who has scripted Episode Five. Mathieson has written some of the best episodes for Capaldi's Doctor over the past two series and so it's great news that he's back. He describes his episode as "*very, very scary*" as well as "*a taut thrill ride*" and "*a pitch black satire*".

Starring Peter Capaldi as the Doctor and Pearl Mackie as Bill, with Matt Lucas recurring as Nardole, Series Ten is expected to broadcast in spring 2017.

Colour of the Daleks

By now, you may have enjoyed the animated release of classic Patrick Troughton serial *The Power of the Daleks*. The BBC has announced a colour version of the animation, to be released on BBC Store on December 31st followed by a special edition Blu-ray (featuring both versions) on February 6th, 2017. American fans can pick up a Region 1 DVD with both versions, exclusively at Barnes & Noble from January 24th. Sure, it's a cynical, cash-grabbing move to release the thing twice in two months, but collectors gonna collect.

DOCTOR WHO Experience to Close

Some sad news, as it's been announced that the **Doctor Who** Experience in Cardiff will close its doors for the last time in summer 2017, due to its lease ending. Since July 2012, the Experience has given young and old fans alike the opportunity to step into the TARDIS and go on an adventure with the Doctor, and has hosted an extensive exhibition of props and costumes. An online petition has been launched to save the Experience, but as that may be optimistic, anyone who's not yet done so should take that trip into time and space, via Cardiff Bay, before next summer.

PIRATE PLANET Novel

After the success of last year's *City of Death* novel, writer James Goss has adapted another classic Douglas Adams **Doctor Who** story, this time *The Pirate Planet*. It's a different take on the Fourth Doctor adventure, though, as it's based not on the 1978 TV serial but on an earlier draft of Adams' script, found in the Douglas Adams archive in Cambridge.

The story sees the Doctor, Romana, and K9 tracing a segment of the Key to Time to the planet Calufrax. But they find themselves on the wrong planet – Zanak, ruled by the mysterious 'Captain', who keeps the citizens happy by announcing a New Golden Age whenever the mines run out of gems, followed by them mysteriously filling up again...

The Pirate Planet will be published on January 5th from BBC Books.





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WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE WHONIVERSE BY JR SOUTHALL



There's been a lot of fuss over *The Power of the Daleks* and the arrival of the second Doctor Who these last few months, and not undeservingly; the first regeneration was a massive stepping stone in the series' longevity and Patrick Troughton's success was key to that. Plus, it doesn't hurt that his début story would always land very high in All Time Best Story lists in spite of nobody being able to watch it; that isn't set to change now that we can.

But little seems to have been made, relatively speaking, of William Hartnell's departure – although I suppose the first Doctor's plaudits were given back in November 2013 – or indeed of the other new arrival that first graced our screens in October 1966. The Cybermen have always played second fiddle to the Daleks, and even with fifty years of hindsight that is still the case on their début.

The Tenth Planet is an odd story. Thanks to Hartnell's illness and non-appearance in Episode 3, he's a rather passive presence in his own swansong, and the scientific rationale that accounts for the Monster of the Week doesn't extend to the rest of the story, which is brimming with the kind of fantastic nonsense you might have expected in a *Flash Gordon* serial of thirty years previous.

The most unfortunate aspect of the story, retrospectively speaking, is that the Cybermen arrived on our screens fully-formed (subsequent costume changes notwithstanding). Of course, this isn't unusual in *Doctor Who* – *The Daleks* pulled the same trick back in 1963 – but in this instance it's a notable omission. Generally speaking, the Doctor and his friends encounter alien species on their travels for whom a backstory is one of evolution if one exists at all. The Daleks' backstory in their very first appearance was relative to their position within that story, and didn't need telling beyond what we saw – and, crucially, didn't sell our later understanding of the creatures short. But the Cybermen are perhaps *Doctor Who*'s first invention that deliberately mirrors something about ourselves and our own society, and failing to address that in the instance of their original representation is a sin of omission. Because it allows the programme makers – chief among them Story Editor Gerry Davis and producer Innes Lloyd – to return to that well without feeling the need to focus on the reason for its existence.

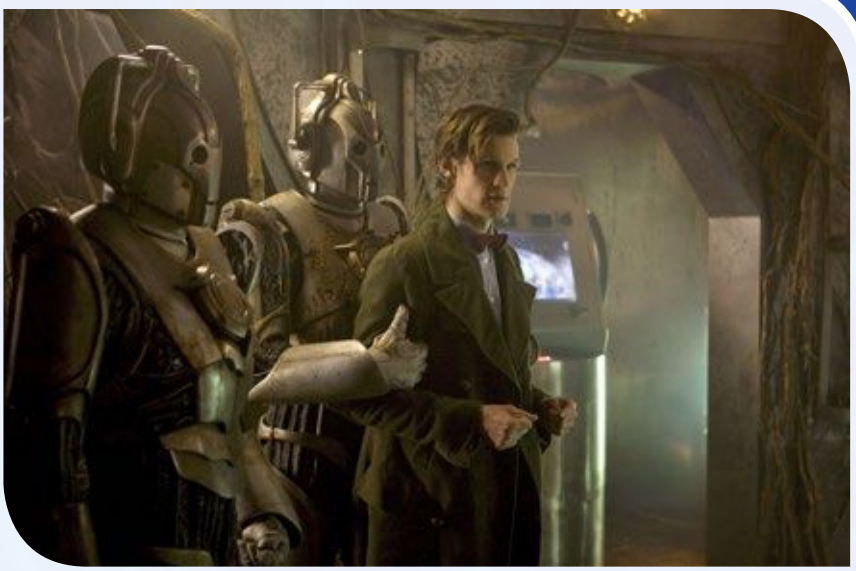
Famously, the Cybermen were Kit Pedler's response to the culture of body and organ replacements that were sweeping the scientific news of the age. The 1960s were still a period during which religious concerns – the question of what the soul consisted of and of what constituted a 'human being' – were a fundamental part of the media in western society. In the UK, this is no longer the case, as demonstrated in Russell T Davies' representation of a new species of Cybermen focusing very much on technological upgrades rather than human transplants. But with the Daleks moving rapidly out of the picture, Davis and Lloyd simply used the Cybermen as generic robotic replacements, ready to fulfil a function in

increasingly unlikely plots in which the enemy needed to plug a specific kind of hole but for which the particulars of the creature itself weren't especially important.

Thus we end up with stories like *The Moonbase*, in which the Gravitron itself is the centre of attention and the threat might as easily come from Ice Warriors or Quarks (had either of those monsters been created yet) or, at a push, even the Daleks. *The Tomb of the Cybermen* goes a little way towards addressing the notion of 'you will be like us', but as RTD proved in his 21st century Dalek stories, that didn't necessarily need to be something specific to the Cybermen. Neither of these stories, nor indeed any that have come since (on television at least), really got into the issues of what conversion might really mean, nor of how it might more widely affect a society or an individual's place within it.

There is also a secondary issue in the depiction of the Cybermen, one of a logical approach to their behaviour. One of the first concerns raised about their actions in the series was the way in which they had also replaced emotion with logic, but again this is something that hasn't really been investigated in any real sense. In fact, the 'logic' that they display in their 1960s appearances is altogether rather questionable; from skulking around and behaving like naughty schoolchildren in *The Moonbase*, to burying themselves without a key in *The Tomb of the Cybermen*, the plots in which they appeared became ever more ludicrously convoluted – although this was offset for viewers by the serialised nature of the series; by the time the Cybermen were marching across the moon in March 1967, viewers would have forgotten that they had been hanging around in cupboards just a couple or three weeks earlier. When *The Invasion* came along in late 1968, the Cybermen were so generically lacking in character, they needed a human mouthpiece just to keep the story ticking along for eight episodes.

Indeed, unlike the Daleks, who have remained largely unaltered in more than fifty



years, with the exception of the jug handles, the Cybermen have had their appearance altered quite radically any number of times, with three very different physical depictions in their first two or so years alone.

Terrance Dicks knew the limitations of what they had become, and with one single exception (in which the Cybermen were relegated to supporting characters to the slightly more interesting Vogans), it was more than a decade before they returned on a more regular basis during the 1980s – and even then, largely because they fulfilled the script editor's brief for macho posturing at the expense of a more thoughtful kind of plot when they did. *Attack of the Cybermen* finally paid lip service to the ideas that Kit Pedler had first introduced, but only as an excuse for some grim visuals very much subservient to more important questions of repairing continuity errors, while in *Silver Nemesis* and *Earthshock* the Cybermen were simply there to look camp while killing people, well-cooked meals or no.

Funnily enough, outside of Russell T Davies' reinvention of the Cybermen as an example to people of what might befall them if they allow their dependence on technology to become too much of an imperative, it is in the less well regarded Cybermen stories of the modern series that the Cybermen have been treated most thoughtfully. In *The Next Doctor*, Mercy Hartigan is very much an analogy for the kind of thinking that fetishises material and physically technological gain at the expense of human endeavour and personality. And in *Death in Heaven*, Steven Moffat goes back to religious concerns and questions of mortality and its most fundamental meanings, and presents a horrific scenario that Kit Pedler would undoubtedly have been proud of but that modern viewers found perhaps too disturbing to contemplate.



However, it is in maybe the least well regarded modern Cyberman story of all, that the most basic issues raised by Pedler back in *The Tenth Planet* are finally addressed. *Closing Time* deals in the most basic way with the question of what a human being stands to lose in becoming a Cyberman, and deals metaphorically with the issue of how to combat that. People didn't like the 'love conquers technology' ending of the episode, but in truth it is without question the one most relevant to what the Cybermen stand for.

It seems we're finally getting the kind of Cybermen stories we probably always should have had, but we're so used to seeing the Cybermen as walking weapons we aren't appreciating them.

Either way, the Cybermen have proved and continue to prove to be an enduring creation, RTD's second choice after the Daleks for the modern revival's early returning monsters (in fact, one sort-of turned up just before that first Dalek did), and the kind of monster that even people who don't watch *Doctor Who* will recognise the name of. Regardless of their changing fortunes, there must be some reason for that; the idea that one day we might all be robots, perhaps, rather than the way the programme itself has dealt with that idea over the years?

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT



HAPPY WHO YEAR

As we prepare to welcome in another New Year, will there be a better time to look at the surprisingly many similarities between *Doctor Who* as it was in its year of birth - 1963 - and where it picked up in 2005 after Russell T Davies' long campaign to get it back? Consider the most obvious starting points - the contemporary London of the time serves as the backdrop for the openings of both Season and Series One (to throw a slight if fan-pleasing differential into the works) - Shoreditch's I.M. Foreman junkyard and the Powell Estate becoming staging posts for two very different incarnations of the same Time Lord as well as providing parking for their very different TARDISes, the original roundelled interior design replaced with a more neutral 'coral' scheme upon the programme's triumphant return.

Whether their erstwhile captains are as different as at first they appear to be is open to debate, though. Both appear shrouded in a certain mystery - William Hartnell's crotchety old man coming under a degree of suspicion thanks to his deliberate evasion of Coal Hill schoolteachers Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright, not to mention their line of questioning. You will recall also Christopher Eccleston's Ninth Doctor's pseudo-abduction of companion Rose Tyler coming to a head circa *Aliens of London*.

JACKIE: It's you.
ROSE: Of course it's me.
JACKIE: Oh, my God. It's you. Oh my God.
DOCTOR: It's not twelve hours, it's twelve months. You've been gone a whole year. Sorry.
JACKIE: The hours I've sat here, days and weeks and months, all on my own. I thought you were dead, and where were you? Travelling. What the hell does that mean, travelling? That's no sort of answer. You ask her. She won't tell me. That's all she says. Travelling.
ROSE: That's what I was doing.
JACKIE: When your passport's still in the drawer? It's just one lie after another.

All this a short while after his discovery of the London Eye had helped him save the Earth from a return visit by the Nestene Consciousness, Jon Pertwee's Earth-bound era as the Third Doctor no doubt



inspiring Davies in his quest to similarly ground things for a whole new generation of viewers. The first wave will undoubtedly also recall his younger self materialising near the capital's Post Office Tower at the outset of *The War Machines*.

What's now known as the BT Tower will serve as a base for WOTAN (Will Operating Thought Analogue), an advanced computer with a touch of megalomania, as it comes to the rather worrying decision that its creators, and by extension their species, are hardly fit to run things and sets about putting that right. The setting is also revisited in the maiden comic strip outing for Eccleston, as *The Love Invasion* finds him right back in the Swinging London of 1966, with a nostalgic if brief glimpse of Ben Jackson and Polly Wright just for old time's sake.

For them, of course, it's but a short while since they left his side having eased viewers through the first regeneration, a role almost every companion since has played to some degree prior to their own eventual exit stage left. That was the final act of *The Faceless Ones* as Patrick Troughton alleviated himself in the role.

BEN: Did you say 1966?
POLLY: Yes.
BEN: What month is it?
DOCTOR: It's July. July the 20th, to be precise.
POLLY: What are you getting at?
BEN: Don't you see, Duchess? July the 20th, 1966 is when it all began! We're back to when it all started. Well, I think.
POLLY: That means it's as if, it's as if we've never been away.
DOCTOR: You really want to go, don't you?

Eccleston, though, would present his take on the Doctor as a complete polar opposite to dear old Pat, the Doctor's Doctor if you take into account the praise lavished upon his rumpled McCartney-ite interpretation by successors Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy, and Matt Smith.

He is also the first Doctor that



Christopher recalls, as he told one interviewer, "***The first one I remember is Patrick Troughton. For some reason when people say 'Doctor Who' I have this black and white image of his face, his fantastic face, but the ones I grew up with were Baker and Pertwee.***"

In talking Baker he is referring to Tom, a favourite of the man who cast him - naming *The Ark in Space* a personal high water mark. Although, in coming up with the overall feel of the revived series, it seems *City Of Death* took the biscuit.

Julie Gardner, another key behind the scenes cog in the BBC machine, took to it after Russell included it in a list of his favourites. Speaking before a Comic-Con panel in 2009, she would say "***I didn't really watch the show, but when I was fortunate enough to take over, Russell gave me a homework list. It was Russell's favourite episodes. City of Death, for me, the Tom Baker story, I just loved it, and from the moment of watching that story, I thought there was so much we could do with it. It's so fun, it's so mad.***"

That it is. Shades of the bescarfed one's meeting with Countess Scarlioni abound in his leather jacketed successor's awkward first encounter with the aforementioned Jackie Tyler isn't the half of it either. "***You're a beautiful woman, probably***" rivalled for that hint of toe-curling awfulness by Rose's dear old mum's realisation that there's a strange man in her bedroom.

Perhaps it's that seven-year stretch between 1974-81 that should truly take the credit in spurring the rebirth, composer Murray Gold even using samples from the era's arrangement of that most famous of theme tunes as part of his own, more orchestral, vision for the music of this brave new *Who*, with his currently ongoing position as composer-in-residence rivalling only Dudley Simpson - who, was at the helm of all matters musical before being unceremoniously given the order of the boot by John Nathan-Turner after completing work on *The Horns Of Nimon*.

Nathan-Turner's opinion was that the in-house Radiophonic Workshop and their array of synthesisers were the way forward, hence Peter Howell's refreshing (to his ears, at least) take on things from *The Leisure Hive* onwards. How times change, it would seem, as the powers that be would later tell Gold that that sort of thing was exactly what they didn't want! How to get the sound of an orchestra without having the budget for a real one until the following series would become something of a dilemma for him.

A closer listen to what had gone before inspired him to pinch "***the electronic 'scream' at the start, the famous swooping top line, the organ harmony underneath, the bass line, and the 'time tunnel whoosh' at the very end.***" as he would later say. All of which had been put there in the first place by Delia Derbyshire in time for *An Unearthly Child*. The more things change, the more they stay the same...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

THE LATEST DOCTOR WHO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO: ORDER OF THE DALEKS

DIRECTOR: JAMIE ANDERSON / AUTHOR: MIKE TUCKER / STARRING: COLIN BAKER, MIRANDA RAISON, JOHN SAVIDENT, OLIVIA HALLINAN, NICHOLAS BRIGGS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Daleks have been around for over fifty years now, and so doing something new with them while staying true to their character is a difficult task. But the cover and promotional art for Order of the Daleks, the latest in Big Finish's monthly range, boldly flaunt its new take – a Dalek of stained glass.

Before they meet this colourfully designed villain, the Sixth Doctor and his companion Constance Clarke land on Strellin, one of those medieval planets that somehow still have similar religious orders to Earth. Here they encounter Assessor Pendle and his trainee Asta from the Galactic Census, who're here to investigate a mysterious signal. This leads them to a monastery, where the Brotherhood of the Black Petal are guarding a mysterious secret... yeah, alright, that secret is the Daleks. Having crashed on Strellin, a Dalek squad has found a gruesome way to survive.

The fact that it's a small number of wounded Daleks allows this story to take on a smaller-scale yet more horror-inflected tone than the more epic stories of, for example, the War Doctor series. This is something that writer Mike Tucker pulls off effectively, with some genuinely scary moments, even making the blob-like mutants inside the casings into a credible and nasty threat. The stained-glass Daleks of the cover, their casings repaired by the monks, are either a great visual idea or a very silly one – opinions will be divided on this.

The Daleks' scheme itself is suitably evil and over-the-top, though the way they use the monks to their advantage does raise questions of whether it fits within their usual modus operandi of racial purity. Also, when the truth behind the 'Black Petal' is revealed, it comes in a rather exposition-heavy way and we never really get to see a lot of its effects.

Nevertheless, Colin Baker's on fine form as the Doctor and it's good to hear his relationship with the inexperienced yet practical Constance develop. John Savident is perfectly cast as the petty, arrogant Pendle, who comes at odds with the Doctor to amusing effect, particularly in the story's early sections. Olivia Hallinan's Asta gets the story's strongest character arc, as she must step out from under the shadow of her overbearing superior. The monks themselves don't leave as much of an impression, though do all get defined characteristics and something to do in the story.

Order of the Daleks is a worthy Dalek story, then. Despite some areas where the script could be refined, it's on solid ground when using the Daleks to horrific effect, and its new ideas set it sufficiently apart from the hundreds of other Dalek stories – even if that cover Dalek could probably be defeated with a hammer.

KIERON MOORE

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DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES - THE RAVELLI CONSPIRACY

DIRECTOR: LISA BOWERMAN / WRITER: ROBERT KHAN, TOM SALINSKY / STARRING: MAUREEN O'BRIEN, PETER PURVES, MARK FROST, JAMIE BALLARD, ROBERT HANDS, OLIVIA POULET, JOE BOR / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The thing about revisiting the past with Doctor Who is that nobody expects accuracy; after all, our eponymous hero didn't really avert a victory for Harold at Hastings, nor did he start the Great Fire of Rome. And Dennis Spooner left the post of story editor in the spring of 1965 having introduced Peter Purves as companion Steven Taylor, writing The Time Meddler, Steven's first full story, as something of a parting gift. So nobody would really expect to find a Spooner-esque historical comedy-drama in the midst of Season Three, and yet in Robert Kahn and Tom Salinsky's first story for Big Finish, that's where the ghost of the late writer turns up. Set somewhere in the region of The Daleks' Master Plan (which Spooner did indeed have a hand in), The Ravelli Conspiracy feigns to imitate Donald Cotton, but actually presents a much closer facsimile of the author of The Reign of Terror and ghost-writer of Patrick Troughton's introduction in The Power of the Daleks.

These rompish historical adventures were once the forgotten and occasionally despised products of early Doctor Who, but time – and availability – has been kind to them, and Kahn and Salinsky's account of Niccolò Machiavelli's attempt to worm his way into the court of the Medici in 1514 Florence is as entertaining as anything from the first Doctor's tenure. The audio production is a perfectly judged recreation of what Spooner might have written had he spent another few months in the job.

To reveal anything of the plot would be to spoil the joy of it, suffice it to say that the Doctor's plan to get Vicki and Steven to the 28th century goes somewhat awry, and 16th century Italy is where they end up. There's a sense that The Ravelli Conspiracy is what Spooner would have produced had he been scriptwriter on The Massacre, but it's actually a good fit for The Romans, several centuries down the line – and of course, the twist in the tail is that this is how the series would have taught 1960s children where the term Machiavellian comes from.

Purves and Maureen O'Brien sound rather older than they did fifty years ago, but fall into their roles with consummate ease, and Purves' Hartnell is note perfect, so much so you will forget from time to time that it's not the first Doctor himself. The rest of the cast revel in the ripe characterisations they've been written, and overall The Ravelli Conspiracy is an example of Big Finish taking great delight in playing with the idiosyncrasies of Doctor Who circa 1965, with the benefit of five decades' worth of hindsight to help fine tune their understanding of it. An enormous pleasure.

JR SOUTHALL

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ED STOPPARD • GEOFF McGIVERN • HEIDA REED • MICHAEL COCHRANE • RAAD RAWI



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LIVVY BOOTE IS...

THE GIRL FROM PLANET X

It's Christmas time. At least, it's close enough to Christmas that Michael Bublé is making his appearance, the trees are up in the shops and the brisk weather is putting us in the festive mood. And, as a bookseller, I can tell you - shit gets *crazy* as soon as it turns November, which is when I'm writing this.

People love to buy books for people, but quite often, it's very difficult to do so even if you know that person well. It's my job as a bookseller to help people through this, and through this experience, I've developed a pretty good knowledge of excellent, feminist sci-fi and fantasy fiction. So, if you're struggling with what to buy your family and friends, here's a list of books by some of the best female authors of the genre, past and present, alongside one of their best titles.

Sheri S. Tepper - The Gate to Women's Country

I heard about this book on Radio 4 a while ago, and I found it an incredibly interesting, unsettling read. In response to the death of patriarchal society, women take power in the hope of creating a fairer place to live. Surrounded by nuclear waste from the apocalyptic end of man's rule over the world, the women stay within the confines of the city walls, educating themselves and leading, whilst the men are sent out to fight. At a young age, boys are given the choice to stay within the walls and be ridiculed and compared to a eunuch, or be separate from their mother and sisters forever to join their father in battle. A fascinating perspective on the dangers of inequality - regardless of which gender is in charge.

Margaret Atwood - Hagseed

Margaret Atwood is one of the most notable fantasy writers of our time. After winning the first ever Arthur C. Clarke award in 1987 for the incredible *The Handmaid's Tale*, she made her mark within the genre and continued to produce consistently unsettling fiction. With her new release, *Hagseed*, she has reimagined Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. It's in hardback in shops right now, and would make an amazing Christmas present.

Mary Shelley - Frankenstein

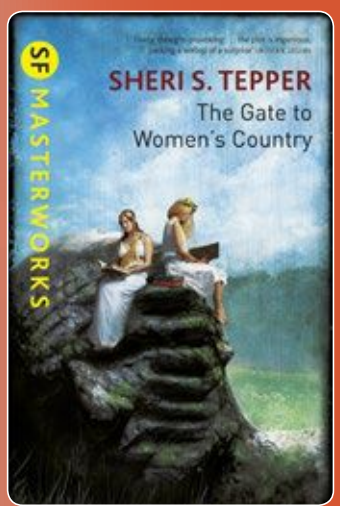
People argue over who the first sci-fi writer was, as if it's even debatable. It's not: unless you consider ancient Greek and Roman writers such as Lucian or Lucretius sci-fi writers, Mary Shelley was the first. *Frankenstein* paved the way for science fiction, bringing light to a new and terrifyingly relevant genre. The question of how far science can - or should - go arose, triggering a flood of fiction like *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and, later on, H. P. Lovecraft's short stories. If you're stuck for books to read, you can always return to the mother of sci-fi, Mary Shelley.

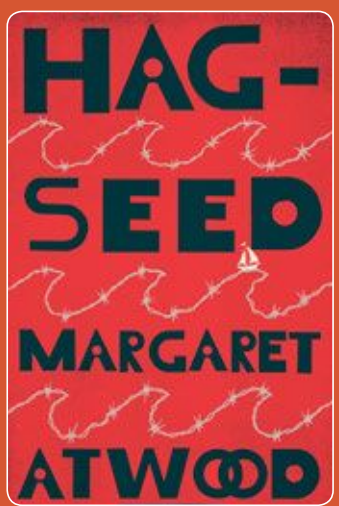
Madeleine L'Engle - A Wrinkle in Time

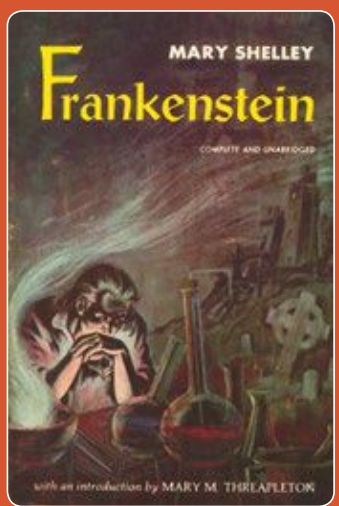
First published in the 1960s, L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* received mixed reviews. Having been considered too complex to be classified as a children's book, it then won the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. It was a struggle for L'Engle to publish it, as it was 'too different' and 'deals overtly with the problem of evil'. Enjoyed nowadays by children, young adults, and adults alike, the story follows a young girl, her gifted family, and her absent father who is finding the answers to a fabled 'tesseract'. This tesseract acts as a worm hole, creating 'wrinkles' in time so that those who wield it may time travel. An exciting book perfect for anyone this Christmas.

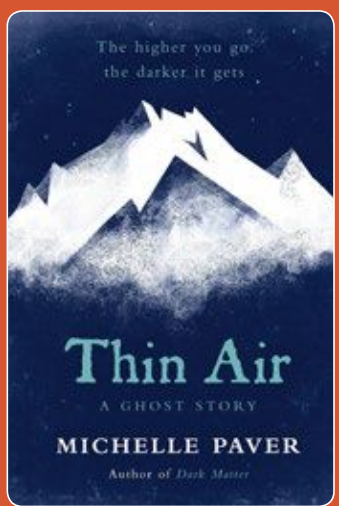
Michelle Paver - Thin Air

Michelle Paver is one of my favourite writers at the moment. *Thin Air* is currently in hardback in shops right now, and is a sort of sequel to her previous ghost story, *Dark Matter.* In both stories, the protagonist is a scientist, with little aim in life and looking for change or excitement. As they explore some of the world's most desolate places - in *Thin Air*'s instance, the Himalayan mountain Kanchenjunga - their understanding of the universe crumbles away as they are haunted by the unimaginable. *Dark Matter* and *Thin Air* are frightening masterpieces. Christmas









THERE ARE A LOT OF BOOKS OUT THERE TO READ - HOW CAN WE FIND THE GOOD STUFF?

Here's a list of recommended fiction by female authors...

is the perfect time of year for a good ghost story, especially ones set in snowy scenes. Terrify your loved ones this Christmas with some of Paver's best.

Joanna Russ - The Female Man

An excellent piece of 1970s feminist satire, *The Female Man* is a commentary on the need for women to lose their femininity to be taken seriously. There are multiple female protagonists who, from several different times and universes, cross paths. By meeting each other, they exchange their ideas of gender identity, gender roles, and what it means to be a woman. It is perhaps a dated piece of fiction now, for its time it reflected Russ's extreme feminist perspective. The female characters cross from world to world, getting to know each other's lives whilst re-evaluating their own. It's strangely heart-warming, as well as thought-provoking.

Muriel Barbery - The Life of Elves

Barbery made her name with *The Elegance of the Hedgehog,* and now her new book, *The Life of Elves,* has come out. Despite having been described as 'unnecessarily abstract' in places, perhaps due to its translation from French, Barbery's strength is in her elaborate descriptions, Tolkien-esque in their detail and beauty. Her two female protagonists both considered geniuses in their individual worlds. One is from the elf world, the other from the human world. Together, they bridge the gap between, while trying to overcome the destructive evil looming over them. It's the perfect book to curl up in front of the fire with.

Frances Hardinge - The Lie Tree

Young Adult fiction's newest jewel in the crown, and with an edition illustrated by Chris Riddell, Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* has captured people's hearts and minds. It's won the Guardian's Children's Fiction Prize and the Carnegie Medal, and it's not hard to see why. Our protagonist discovers her father's notes, which rave about the Lie Tree, a tree that reveals the truth when told a lie. Though it drove her father to madness, Faith is seduced by the idea of such forbidden knowledge. Will it lead her to the same end? This YA book is a classic for any age group this Christmas.

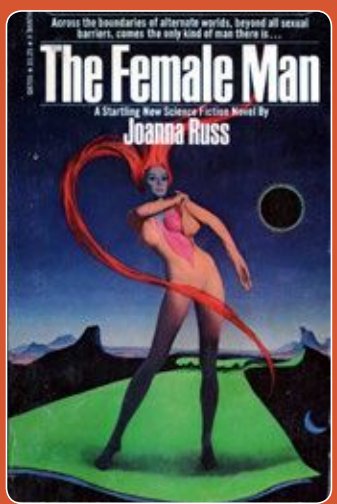
Octavia E. Butler - Kindred

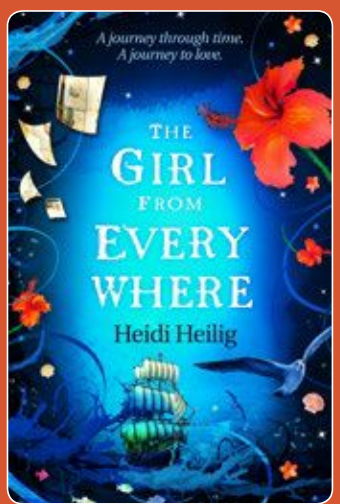
Butler shook the foundations of what science fiction means with *Kindred*. A story that has one foot in sci-fi and another in slave narrative, Butler tells us of an African American female writer who finds herself meeting her ancestors, a white slave owner and a concubine slave. As is often the case with time travel narratives, in order to maintain her existence in her own time, she must survive in the era she has landed in. However, as a black woman on a plantation, this becomes evidently difficult. This chilling novel examines what it means to be a black woman in America, past and present. It's not a light read, but it's certainly an important one in a genre where there are a few too many white writers.

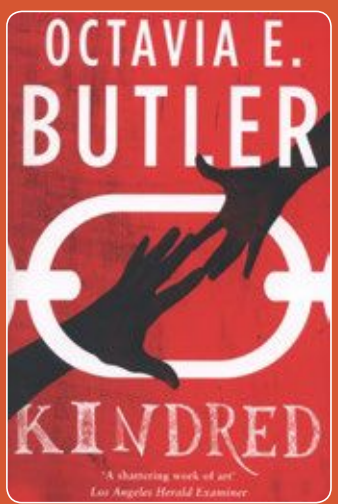
Heidi Heilig - The Girl from Everywhere

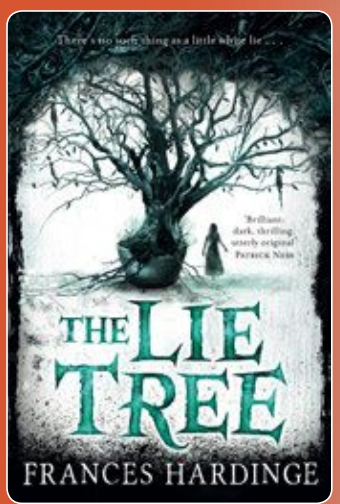
Another great YA novel, *The Girl from Everywhere* is about a young girl called Nix who only knows one thing - her father's ship - and yet she knows everything; on this ship, she can travel anywhere, anytime. Soaring across time and space, she explores real and mythical places. When one day her father embarks on their biggest journey to reunite with her dead mother in the past, her existence hangs in the balance. On the way, she learns what it means to be Nix, and what it means to exist in this world. This is a beautiful, imaginative tale that will transport you from your cold December living room to Honolulu, Africa, and China - everywhere.

I've not read all of these yet, and just writing this I've whet my appetite for every single one of them. I hope you enjoy them as much as I will - Merry Christmas and happy shopping!









DAN DARE RETURNS!

BY TONY JONES

AS THE LEGENDARY COMIC STRIP PREPARES TO MAKE THE LEAP TO BIG FINISH AUDIO DRAMA, WE FIND OUT WHAT WE CAN EXPECT...

Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future **first appeared in the *Eagle* comic from 1950 to 1967, and was dramatised on Radio Luxembourg from 1951 up to 1956. It's been relaunched at various times in comic strip form and from December 2016 is available once more on audio thanks to B7 Media and Big Finish. The first release is three one-disc stories featuring test pilot Dan Dare (Ed Stoppard), Digby (Geoff McGivern), and Professor Peabody (Heida Reed) as they explore the solar system and fight the evil Mekon (Raad Rawi). Big Finish's own Nick Briggs has a part as well, as an alien named Garlok.**

STARBURST caught up with those involved to find out why now is the time for Dan Dare to return. Producer/director Andrew Mark Sewell was the first port of call:

"I was introduced to Eagle by my late father; it first appeared in a time of austerity when the nation needed a new type of hero. Amidst today's global turmoil we are once more in need of a heroic figure. The beliefs, values, and hope Dan Dare represents are just as relevant today."

These sentiments were echoed by all those involved in pre-production, including script editor Colin Brake and lead writers Richard Kurti and Bev Doyle.

The stories have been modernised to avoid the new series just being a museum piece. At hand was comics historian John Freeman, whose job was to make sure they didn't throw the Mekon out with the bath water. They've updated the terminology while keeping the spirit and energy of the original. The stories are also presented as fifteen-minute episodes; Andrew conceived this to match the fifteen-minute BBC Radio Drama slot and Colin Brake confirmed this helps keep the pace and rhythm of the originals, and should be a nice size for commuters to listen to on their way to work.

Once the cast was assembled, it was time to move to studio. Unusually, this cast had gelled before the end of the first day. In the case of Geoff McGivern, he had the experience of





playing Ford Prefect in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* to draw upon, whereas Heida Reed did find it more of a challenge, and a contrast to her recent work in BBC's *Poldark*:

"[It was] terrifying! I haven't done that much voice work and it is a completely different genre than being on stage or in front of a camera. I came to relax into it though and enjoyed how everything is reliant on the tone of your voice. It's a great acting exercise."

Ed Stoppard liked the immediacy of the recording process, and Geoff McGivern sums it up:

"...twelve days virtually all day in front of the mic... We do a lot of running on the spot and ducking as we dodge hideous enemies and nuclear bombs. And shouting, 'Look out!' 356 times a day takes it out of you. We had a ball."

Geoff is also the only member of the cast to have read the comic strips, and Ed admires the character of Dan, though feels he is more courageous and determined than him. He does feel they share a dry wit, whereas Heida feels Dan is the James Bond or Indiana Jones of space. Heida had a lot of fun playing Peabody as she is everything Heida isn't. Geoff admires Digby for his resourcefulness, but will admit to sharing a black humour.

Nick Briggs, who is no stranger to the recording process, gave his perspective:

"Since I spend a lot of my time running studio sessions, it was in some ways refreshing just to turn up and do some acting. It was very thrilling for me to be part of Dan Dare."

Nick went on to reveal he had previously (in the 1990s) spoken to radio legend Dirk Maggs about bringing Dan to audio alongside Colin Baker and John Ainsworth. Nothing happened then but Nick is clearly thrilled to be part of this project. The BBC had aired a four-part adaptation of *Dan Dare: Voyage to Venus* in 1990, so perhaps the timing was against them.

Nick also gave some detail on one of his characters, Garlok:

"...thoroughly unpleasant. Not only does he care for nothing but himself and his own ambitions, his main ambition is to take the Mekon's place. If your ambition is to be a ruthless, conquering dictator, then you're pretty beyond the pale. But that made him delicious to play."

One thing the whole cast agreed upon was the irredeemably evil nature of the Mekon, an essential element of *Dan Dare* since the very beginning. With characteristic dryness, Geoff expanded:

"...at heart, he's a narcissist with an inferiority complex, bent on absolute power. Thank God we don't elect that type of leader on Earth!"

From all accounts, *Dan Dare* should be a great series, and we are already promised a second set of stories in February. *Dan Dare* previously ran for five years back when it was new; given the strengths and successes of both B7 Media and Big Finish, we wouldn't be surprised if they can match that record.

The official DAN DARE audio adventures site is dandareaudio.com and titles are available from bigfinish.com.

DAN DARE
THE AUDIO ADVENTURES

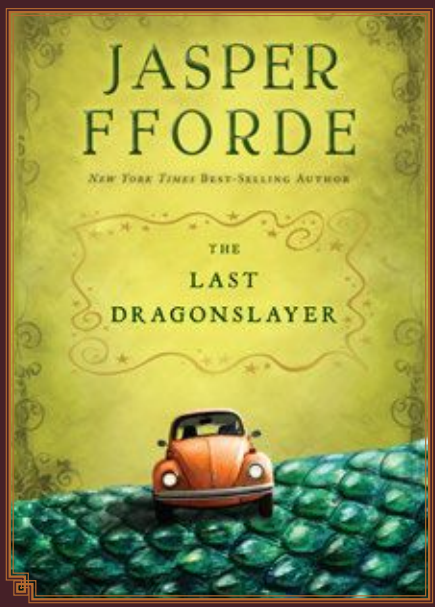
DESTINY CAN'T BE PREDICTED

by Ed Fortune

STARBURST looks at the origins of THE LAST DRAGONSLAYER, the latest novel to get the small screen Yuletide adaptation...















Sky 1 has always had a firm commitment to producing quirky genre TV, from their earliest attempts such as the forgettable Rob Grant effort *The Strangerers* to the more recent (and rather successful) *Yonderland*. Sky's style seems to involve odd ideas, loud characters and very silly situations. So their latest offering, based on Jasper Fforde's *The Last Dragonslayer*, looks to be a perfect match.

For those of you who haven't had the pleasure, Jasper Fforde writes some very sharply witty books. He's best known for his début novel *The Eyre Affair*, which is a comedy detective/murder mystery that sends up Charlotte Brontë's much loved work *Jane Eyre*. It mixed time travel and reality hopping with classic literature to create a very silly (and pun-laden) experience.

The Last Dragonslayer is the first of his series of Young Adult novels called *The Chronicles of Kazam*. It's similar to his other work in that it sends up existing tropes in a genre, but it's more generic than *The Eyre Affair* and its sequels. Rather than a direct attack at the clichés that fill the fantasy genre, Fforde has taken a more Pratchett-like approach, using the power of magical worlds to examine the human condition, whilst having a good laugh along the way.

The set-up is rather neat. It's sort of the modern age, except magic is real. Back in the day, the rich and the very clever used magic for everything. These days, science has caught up and wonders are easier to find. These days, flying carpet users are in direct competition with motorcycle couriers and the like. The power of the wizards is fading, and the world doesn't really seem to care that it's all going.

The tale focuses on Jennifer Strange, a young lass who runs an agency for mages called Kazam Mystical Arts Management. If you have a problem and you want it solved with occult flare (rather than reliability), Kazam are just who you need. Things come to a head when King Snodd arranges for a seer to confirm when the last dragon will die.

You see, not only are dragons a protected species, but also have their own wildlife preserve, which happens to be a big chunk of the Welsh Marches. Snodd and his multi-billionaire business chums would quite like it if the dragon would get on with being dead, so they can grab the land.

Strange finds herself caught up in these machinations. Not only does she have to the deal with an ageing dragon slayer (130 years old and not even a telegram from the King), she also has to cope with a menagerie of mystical beasties all set on helping her sort out the ancient and ailing dragon, Maltcassion. Along the way, she even picks up a magic sword. Which is sort of useful...











Fforde, true to form, vacillates wildly through the book between deeply serious and very, very funny. Sky chose screenwriter Tom Edge to adapt the work and it's easy to see why. Edge is best known for Glasgow-based sitcom, *Lovesick* (otherwise known as *Scrotal Recall*). The show is about a chap who has taken it upon himself to contact all his ex-lovers and tell them that he has chlamydia. It's a heady mix of awkward slapstick and mawkishness and it seems a perfect fit for the awkward comedy that is *The Last Dragonslayer*.

The killer of dragons herself is to be played by Ellise Chappell, whom we last saw in *Poldark* and seems drawn to fantasy and genre roles. She was even rumoured to be one of those on the long-list of potential *Doctor Who* companions the last time that speculation was rife. She'll be playing opposite John Bradley-West, who is better known as Sam in *Game of Thrones*. John is likely to playing something quite different to the reluctant Sam - a character so resourceful that he somehow still manages to find plenty of pies in a wasteland. Rounding that cast off is Ricky Tomlinson, best known for *The Royle Family* and also being Ricky Tomlinson.

The Sky production intends to pitch the story firmly at the Christmas audience. Though it's unlikely to beat *Doctor Who* as the highlight of genre telly, it's interesting that Sky seem to be going in the direction of fantasy comedy, especially when you consider that *The Last Dragonslayer* is part of a series of books, which will probably stop at book four.

Will we see another feature based on the next book, *The Song of the Quarkbeast*? Is a Christmas telly-watching audience really ready for iMagic and supersonic magic carpet chases? Will we all gaze into *The Eye of Zoltar* (the third book) and meet sky pirates and spoilt teenage celebs? Will it all end with the fourth story, *The Great Troll War*, or will Jasper Fforde decide to keep writing these things? Time will probably tell… it usually does.

THE LAST DRAGONSLAYER will be broadcast on SKY 1, now confirmed to air Christmas day, 5.45pm.





HORROR Obscura

This month, the menacing Martin Unsworth raises the spirits with a recent haunting film you may have overlooked...











Everybody loves a good ghost story, it's just a shame that so many of them have recently fallen short on chills, instead resorting to jump scares and excuses to indulge in poorly conceived CGI. So when *We Are Still Here* made its way onto the festival scene in 2015, it was received well by critics and audiences, but it seemed to be lost on the general public when it finally reached the home market. Not only does the film evoke the feel of the much-loved Lucio Fulci films of the early eighties such as The *House by the Cemetery* and *The Beyond,* it also succeeds in scaring the living daylights out of its audience.

Paul and Anne Sacchetti (Andrew Sensenig and genre icon Barbara Crampton) are in mourning for their son, a loss that has naturally put a strain on their relationship. In order to try to start again, they move into a new home in a rural New England village. It's an imposing old house, and almost instantly, Anne feels there is a presence there. She is convinced it is Bobby, their deceased son. A photo of their son that the couple proudly display in a frame on the sideboard is found shattered. Anne reminds Paul that Bobby didn't like the photo, hiding it when he had girls around. She sees it as a certain sign that he's there with them.

There is certainly *something* ominous about the place, particularly in the cellar. A constant smell of smoke and an intense heat makes Paul call an electrician. While he's working away down there, 'something' grabs him, scorching his flesh and leaving him writhing in agony. Paul assumes it was a faulty boiler, and thinks nothing else of it.

A few weeks into their residence, they are visited by their nearest neighbours, Dave and Cat, who welcome them to the area in a rather sinister way. Dave tells them the macabre history of their new abode. In 1859, the house used to be a family-run mortuary. The family, the Dagmars, were allegedly run out of town after it was discovered they were burying empty coffins and selling the corpses. The house has only sporadically been lived in since then, the occupiers not lasting too long. As the couple are leaving, Cat hands Anne a crumpled piece of paper bearing a scribbled note: 'The house needs families. Get out.' Although unsettled by this, they decide to stay on, and ask some old friends to come to stay. The invitation comes with a loaded reason, however, as May (Lisa Marie, perhaps best known as Vampira in *Ed Wood* and the slinky 'Martian woman' in *Mars Attacks!*) is a New Age type who claims to have psychic abilities while her husband Jacob (Larry Fessenden) is a stoner.

Jacob and May's son and girlfriend are also planning to come to visit, too; Harry (Michael Patrick Nicholson), having been a close friend of Bobby's, is keen to show his support, but Daniella (Kelsea Dakota) is a little anxious, particularly when he tells her that 'Bobby' could be haunting the place. Rather than wait for the youngsters, the group head into town for a meal, leaving a note to make themselves at home. Which, of

course, they do in the way all teens will when left alone - no, not by lounging about playing Xbox games, they crack open the whiskey and begin to get frisky. Before they can get down to it, though, a noise disturbs them. Harry thinks it's come from the basement and goes to investigate, only to be attacked by the scorched spectre that is lurking down there, cinders soaring as the presence chars his flesh. Daniella makes a run for it, and gets as far as the highway when she too is slain - with an arm thrust straight through her chest. It is clear whatever vengeful spirits are lurking in the Dagmar house, they are able to corporeally appear outside the confines of the old wooden structure.

Meanwhile, the foursome's meal isn't going too good as the bar they have chosen to eat in has an atmosphere as frosty as the surrounding area. May has a feeling something's wrong just at the time her son is being roasted alive, so they leave to head back to the house. There's no sign of the youngsters so they assume that they didn't arrive and will be there later.

The whole town are aware of the house and the significance of having a family there for the first time in thirty years, and under the instruction of sinister neighbour Dave, they are not going to allow the newcomers to leave - and if the house and its residents won't take the family for themselves, the townsfolk will make sure they are sacrificed.

We Are Still Here has a lot more to it than that simple synopsis, but it's not our job here to spoil the enjoyment of the viewer's discovery. Rest assured, however, the climax is as shocking and gore-spattered as anything Fulci came up with, and is surprisingly satisfying, something modern horror films often fail to be. It's also realised with physical special effects - barring a few digital embellishments on the burnt Dagmar family - which certainly pack a bigger punch than many of the CGI spectres and blood spurts we're getting fed these days.

Written and directed by Ted Geoghegan, a producer/screenwriter who has a few credits to his name over the past few years (including 2009 shocker *Sweatshop* and Andrea Schnaas' *Demonium*), and who impresses greatly with his début in the director's chair. Not only does the film ooze atmosphere, the visuals are perfect. The way the exteriors are shot is in stark contrast to the oppressive and foreboding interiors. It's also a very adult shocker. Unlike many recent ghost stories, *We Are Still Here* takes a more measured and mature approach to its chills. Despite it being Geoghegan's début feature, he displays fantastic restraint and the film is all the more engaging for it.

That's not to say there are not some lighter moments. As a veteran of many recent genre efforts - both in front of and behind the screen - Larry Fessenden brings a level of humour to the proceedings. His laid-back stoner character adds some levity, but never at the expense of the story and never so much as to derail the brooding terror. Fessenden's been an almost omnipresent

















face on the US independent film scene for the past few years. One of those faces that people instantly recognise but then can't place where from, he's most notably apeared in *Cabin Fever 2: Spring Break*, *Jughead* (renamed *The Pit* in the UK), *I Sell the Dead* and *You're Next*. It was on the latter that he first worked with Barbara Crampton (as did Geoghegan, who was helping with the movie's PR). Barbara shouldn't need much introduction to genre fans, having graced at least two of the '80s' most iconic and memorable movies - *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*. But her role here is less the scream queen and more measured, minimalist and believable. This is someone who has recently gone through a traumatic and tragic event (the loss of her son) and, while not gullible, is open to the suggestion that the boy is trying to stay close.

There are elements of so many influences in the film, yet it still feels fresh and exciting. It's coincidental that Crampton appeared in the two Stuart Gordon movies mentioned, as *We Are Still Here* has a kernel of H. P. Lovecraft to the tale. The malevolent family - burnt beyond recognition and out for regular vengeance from the small town - may not be the archetypal Lovecraft antagonists but the mood and uneasiness created sure is.

As mentioned, there are also similarities to the latter work of Fulci, but the parallels don't stop at the setting and atmosphere. The electrician that receives a frazzled arm is named Joe - just like the plumber in the Italian's 1981 epic *The Beyond* (who also meets an unfortunate demise in that cellar). And, more obviously, the mortician is named after the actor Dagmar Lassander (albeit with a not-so-subtle switch-around). She is a veteran of Fulci movies herself, appearing in *The Black Cat* and *The House by the Cemetery* (both 1981) as well as cult classics *Femina ridens* (*The Laughing Woman*, 1969) and Luciano Ercoli's *Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (1970). Almost every character in the film has a name influenced by *The House by the Cemetery*; just not as obviously as the Dagmars!

If you want a film that pays enough reverence to the 'old-school' horror movies but still packs a mighty wallop when it comes to the gore, you can't go wrong with *We Are Still Here*. Make sure you sit through the end titles, though, as there are a series of newspaper headlines that fill in what has been going on in the town for the past hundred-or-so years and why the townsfolk were so terrified of the Dagmars' curse. Oh, and there's a really neat little sting, too.

Ted Geoghegan is currently in post-production with his next directorial effort, *Mohawk*, which promises to be another tale of revenge and survival, only this time involving a squad of American soldiers. If it's half as good as *We Are Still Here*, we can't wait.

WE ARE STILL HERE screens on Horror Channel on January 14th, 2017. Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.



INDEPENDENTS DAY

by Kieron Moore

TWO-HEADED SNAKE ENTERTAINMENT

The Best Feature award at this year's STARBURST International Film Festival went to GOOD TIDINGS, an edge-of-your-seat slasher film set at Christmas. We caught up with the gang behind it – director STUART W. BEDFORD, producer/writer/actor STU JOPIA and executive producer/actor/writer GIOVANNI GENTILE – to find out more...



STARBURST: How did you get into filmmaking?

Stuart W. Bedford: To be honest, it was a long series of events that got me to the point that I decided film was where I wanted to be: a lifelong obsession with cinema, an all-consuming drive to create and, obviously, a desperate need for attention! But the moment the switch flicked in my head was when *Shaun of the Dead* came out. I was obsessed with that movie! I went to the cinema three times to watch it and it just completely captured my imagination. I loved zombie films already, but the idea of a zombie film – which I associated with America – being set down the road from me just tugged at something inside me! I remember thinking 'I want to make someone feel how I feel right now'.

Giovanni Gentile: It was a total coincidence; I shared a ride with Stu Bedford who talked me into it. It wasn't like he planned it or anything, we were driving from a three-day drink-fuelled stag party and it just came up on the three-hour drive home. So I thought 'what the hell, just give it a go' and here we are.

Stu Jopia: I've always loved movies, they have been a huge part of my life, but it wasn't until about five years ago that my brother asked if I wanted to get involved in his third feature film *Cute Little Buggers*. Seeing a movie set was enough for me to fall in love with the whole process and I began the quest to get a feature film made any way I could.

How did you make the jump from short films to your first feature?

SB: I started out with, perhaps predictably, a zombie short called *Survivor* and then worked on a slew of shorts for other people until I was commissioned (at a rate of £500 for the whole project!) to rewrite and direct a short script a guy called James Antonio had written, about a guy with anger management problems. But the real step forward in terms of my career was when I started working with my writing partner, Stu Jopia.

Stu's brother Tony was an established horror director and through those ties, I found myself working on my first feature – *Cute Little Buggers* – as a 1st AD. After we completed that project, Stu and I put ourselves forward to write Tony's next script for his biggest feature to date, *Apocalypse*.

When we'd written *Apocalypse*, we were brought on as producers. But to watch our script being taken off in a direction we didn't necessarily agree with was quite painful. It was a tough time, and while we were there, we conceived of our company, Two-Headed Snake Entertainment, and our first project, *Dark*

GOOD TIDINGS









Continents, which was a H. P. Lovecraft-themed anthology script we planned on seeking funding for.

We spent a good year and a half developing *Dark Continents*, but we'd let our concept spiral out of control and it was far too high concept for a fledgling production company like us. We worked the budget out at around 1.5million; I mean, I'd written space portals and monsters into the thing. It just wasn't something we were able to get the funding for. So really, it was out of sheer frustration that *Good Tidings* was born. It was a 'fuck it, we'll just make something for dead cheap and have done with it'. Which, ironically, was probably exactly what we needed to do in order to start making a name for ourselves.

We managed to persuade a good friend of ours, who you'll now know as executive producer Giovanni Gentile, to give us the money we needed to make our ultra low-budget slasher. We wrote the script in two weeks, pre-produced for two months and then shot the thing in the space of three weeks. It was an absolute blur, and basically a 'jumping in feet first' type deal. Which is good, because I think if we'd had too much time to um and ah over it, we'd probably have bottled it!

Where did the idea for *Good Tidings* come from?

SJ: I'm a huge fan of seasonal-themed horrors, such as *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, *Black Christmas*, and *Gremlins*. I love the fact that these movies get watched every year without fail. It's almost like these movies are timeless and I really wanted to add to this subgenre with a twisted Christmas tale of my own. So I spent a good few nights watching all the Christmas horror movies and the idea was born to have not one but three killer Santas!

I always like to mix things up a little, so pitting these Santas against ordinary people was a must for me. Not wanting the usual 'kids in peril' characters, I looked deep into the Christmas period and what it's about; I saw a news article on the TV about how a town in Britain had erected spikes in places that some homeless people called their homes and in some cases, fined these poor people for living on the streets. It made no sense and really saddened me.

Yeah, the heroes being homeless really gives the film a strong theme; it's mentioned that the world's not kind to the homeless community, especially at Christmas. How much did you set out deliberately to explore this?

SB: Yes! In fact, this was the idea I always referred back to whenever I needed to refocus myself on what we were trying to say – Christmas is cruel to the poor. Obviously, I didn't dig too deeply into that idea for fear of being preachy. I know our audience. They want a solid slasher, and while a nice bit of social commentary is always appreciated, what we all really want to see in a movie like this is a showdown: man vs. monster.

But it's awesome that you guys picked up on the key theme there, as it confirms to me that it does come through! You know, as an independent filmmaker, I've obviously had to sacrifice a lot to be able to do what I do. I've been poor, believe me. So this theme is something I've lived through myself, and while not to the extent of homelessness, I can definitely attest to the fact that Christmas really is cruel to the poor. You're battered by the senselessness of it all: spend! If you don't spend, that means you don't love your family!

How did you go about designing the creepy Santa costumes?

SB: Stu came to me with a very clear vision of the Santas, to the point that he'd already picked out the costumes (not the cheap 'fun run'-style Santa suits, but the plush regal ones – he was very clear on that) and the masks, which were actually cheap wizard masks he found on eBay. So we bought one costume and set about our camera tests. As soon as he put the costume on, it just worked.







Now, I was very concerned about making these three Santas distinct. The physicality of the three performers obviously helped this – Liam W. Ashcroft being six foot five and rippling, Gio who played Larry being jittery and wiry, and Stu himself adding that instep to his performance – but that wasn't all we did to separate them.

To create distinct facial characteristics, we got our FX guy, Andy Savage, to cut the facial hair slightly differently on each mask, and also give them a paint job that accentuated different parts of the masks, giving them slightly different 'expressions'.

The film never reveals who the killers inside the costumes are. What was the reason for keeping this ambiguous? Will you tell us who they are?

SB: It's funny you should mention that, as we actually don't know who they are ourselves, or at least we didn't during the writing and production process. There was a reason for this. Our stuff tends to have one foot in reality and one foot out. I wanted these Santas to be human, but also be sort of like Christmas demons. Mysterious and unknowable, communicating with each other somehow, but never really speaking on camera. So for that reason, I purposefully didn't write backstories for them. They're as much a mystery to me as they are to the audience!

The action is all based around one courthouse – securing this location must have felt like an important step towards the film being real!

SB: The courthouse was more important to *Good Tidings* than you might even realise. Our plan was to follow '70s exploitation rules from the beginning. We only shoot what we have access to; we exploit what we have at hand. So, when our production designer Emily Lewis told us her father was good friends with the owner of the old Southport Courthouse, we were introduced with only a vague concept in mind.

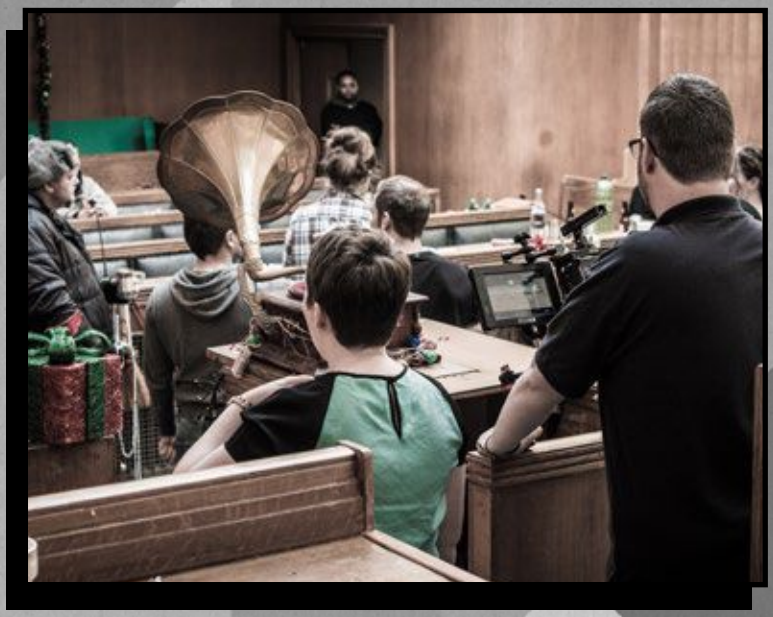
So securing the building had a massive effect on the script?

SB: We didn't even touch the story – beyond the Santas vs. homeless concept – until we'd secured the location. This allowed us a lot of freedom. We wrote with the location in mind, knowing we'd be able to achieve everything we put on paper. If we'd written the story without having secured the courthouse first, we'd likely never have been able to pull it off. Writing for an existing location is so much easier and more cost-effective than writing and then having to find a location, which can often be a lengthy and expensive process. Once we had it in our mitts, everything in the story just fell so neatly into place.

How do you find the co-writing process? Does collaboration help creativity?

SB: It was really finding my collaborative partner that acted as the first stepping stone in producing work I believed was of a standard to be seen by the world. I tend to be quite insecure about my work, whereas Stu has this brash confidence that I often envy. He's also very encouraging, and we can't forget, his concepts are absolutely badass. So whereas on my own, I may end up considering something I'm developing to be dog shit and ultimately throw it in the bin, Stu will see the good in it and not only that, have the answers for how we can make the things that aren't working actually function as part of a cohesive story.

My focus over the years has tended to be on story structure and character development and how the two work together. But my concepts... well, they're usually very low concept, often quite strange and a little bit all over the place. Stu's conceptual mind is very clear and very concise; he has this encyclopaedic knowledge of genre and convention and really focuses up that scattered nature of my thought processes. So it's almost as though Stu acts as a lens through which I can shine my characters and structures into something that's actually cohesive. In this way, I'd say collaboration not only helps the creative process, but is, in fact, instrumental to it.







GG: As long as one person takes lead and is therefore in charge of deciding what stays and what is cut, then yes, it does help collaboration. Otherwise, it's like stepping on each other's toes. People need to be ready to listen to other people's ideas, and also to have their own ideas rejected. Stu Bedford was our lead and was very good at explaining his decisions; for the most part we agreed where the story should be going.

SJ: I love collaborating on scripts and ideas with the guys. It really works for us as writers. Getting different perspectives on scenes, story, plot, and characters that sometimes you don't see yourself is so important to creating something really special. Three heads are better than one. We all have different styles of writing or even just thinking about the story, but once a concept is down we are always on the same page.

What was the atmosphere on set like?

SB: As you can imagine on a project like *Good Tidings*, being shot on a budget of just £9k, there was a very hectic and frenetic atmosphere. Every day was a challenge, and yes, things went wrong, but there was never a time where we thought 'oh god, this is falling apart', and believe me, I've worked on films before when that atmosphere prevailed. The crew we assembled were utterly astounding and no matter what the challenges, we faced them with a smile and a laugh. Everyone from the runners right up to the exec producer were in the trenches together. I really do feel that we made a little family while shooting *Tidings*.

There's one particular story I'd like to share. It involves a certain scene, in which Julia Walsh – who plays Mona – is forced to do something rather horrific with the decapitated head of her husband. Her performance in this scene was just astounding and truly, truly horrifying. So much so that after the first take, Shane (the Director of Photography) and I turned to each other, both white as sheets, absolutely convinced we'd just broken this poor woman, and I said 'Dude... What do we shoot next?' All he could say was 'I don't know...' and if you know Shane, you'd know that this guy always knows what to shoot next. Man, I felt like I had done something wrong in that moment, like I was truly exploiting this poor woman. But god... that scene, though... it works so well. And don't worry, I've spoken to her many times since and she assures me that she was fine! Honestly.

Congratulations on winning the Best Feature award at the STARBURST Film Festival. Were you expecting to win? And will the award help you in your next steps?

GG: I didn't expect it at all, so when I stepped on stage with the others I had nothing to say. Luckily, the others are more expressive than I will ever be and blabbered on. I think it was a good confidence boost that will help us keep up momentum going forward.

SB: Thank you so much guys! Honestly, I had no idea whatsoever that we were going to win. I know everyone says that, but it's true. I saw the movies we were up against. I watched Doug Naylor get a lifetime achievement award on the same stage. There was no way in hell I thought our little upstart of a movie was going to be in with even a sliver of a chance of netting the award. And honestly, when

we were announced, I think I said 'fuck off!' about fifteen times on my way to the stage.

I've fantasised for many years about winning an award for something I made. Hell, I've fantasised for many years about even just making a feature film. And now for *Good Tidings* to have netted Best Feature at STARBURST and at Halloweenpalooza in the States, and then to have won Best Director at Horrorquest in Atlanta, Georgia... my head is spinning at the moment.

I absolutely think this will help us in our next steps. I think these awards will act as proof that we can produce quality, and hopefully with that in mind, we'll be able to convince some poor fool to give us the funds we need to go bigger and better next time!

Any advice you'd give to aspiring independent filmmakers?

SB: Just do it. You'll find there are millions of reasons why you shouldn't: there's no financial security; I have to pay my bills; I might fail; my parents keep telling me to 'get a real job'. Forget all that. If you want to do it, if you have that burning passion for it that just cannot be satisfied by anything else, then you just have to take that leap. Tell yourself 'I am a filmmaker' and then begin making films.

Your work will suck. But you'll keep going. And then it'll suck less. Still you'll keep going. And then one day, you'll look at something you created and you'll feel a glow of pride and achievement that just cannot be matched in any other field.

GG: Don't expect to be rich or famous right away; in fact, expect to be poor! Have contingencies in place and try to get ahead of problems before they happen. Learn from people who have done it before and don't make the classic mistake of thinking you know it all. But, most importantly, work with competent people who you trust.

What's next for you?

SB: Well, we've actually just secured a North American release for *Good Tidings*, so we're taking a bit of time off! But we're actually just about to start developing our next feature length project, which [at time of writing], we're not 100% set in stone with. As is our way, we're looking at locations first and we have two potentially awesome ones in our eyes, both in Southport where we shot *Tidings*: one is a fairground and the other is a huge old stately home. Both are primed for horror!

We're also working closely with the Southport Business Improvement District to bring a brand new genre film festival to the area. Southport is quickly becoming our equivalent to Stephen King's Castle Rock!

So watch this space – you definitely haven't heard the last of the Two-Headed Snake boys!

GOOD TIDINGS is available on VOD in the US and is still doing the festival circuit. You can find out more about Two-Headed Snake Entertainment at facebook.com/Two-Headed-Snake-Entertainment-1528222954061444.



REVIEW:

GOOD TIDINGS

CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR: STUART W. BEDFORD / SCREENPLAY: STUART W. BEDFORD, GIOVANNI GENTILE, STU JOPIA / STARRING: ALAN MULHALL, CLAIRE CROSSLAND, JULIA WALSH / RELEASE DATE: TBC

Christmas may be a happy time of year for many of us, but it's not so easy for the homeless, nor for the victims of festive-themed psychopaths. Unfortunately for the characters in independent horror *Good Tidings*, they fall right into the centre of that Venn diagram.

Stuart W. Bedford's feature builds up its world nicely; one Christmas Day, a group of homeless people squatting in a closed-down courthouse celebrate as best they can, with a feast gathered from supermarket dumpsters. The opening twenty minutes let us get to know the members of this community, including their ex-army leader Sam (Mulhall), recovering junkie Roxie (Crossland), and the caring Mona (Walsh), who looks after her ill husband. And then the machete-wielding Santas show up...

This isn't the first horror movie to give its villain the image of Father Christmas, and it won't be the last, but *Good Tidings*' introduction of its Santas does a chillingly good job at getting you on the edge of your seat. Shane de Almeida's cinematography follows them fluidly as they stalk the corridors, accompanied by a masterfully creepy score by Liam W. Ashcroft – think your favourite Christmas tunes with a satanic bassline. Their masks cross the iconic white beard with more hideous, goblin-like features, and we get very few hints at the men underneath. Unlike, for example, *Rare Exports*, these three Santas aren't meant to be the real Saint Nick; rather they're a gang of nasty killers utilising the festive imagery as part of a sadistic plan to torment their victims. As Sam says, "*It's Christmas Day, and we're their toys*".

After their dramatic entrance, slashing their way through the Christmas party, the film plays out with the Santas stalking the survivors around the building; it's both siege thriller and slasher horror. Bedford and his co-writers Gentile and Jopia astutely give us a mix of action, gore, and character development; however, there's perhaps one instance too many of the old 'getting captured, escaping, then getting captured again' trope, with some sequences not really developing the story as much as others, and so the film could benefit from being fifteen minutes shorter.

Nevertheless, at its best, *Good Tidings* is a damn creepy movie, with a unique setting, interesting characters, and a nasty set of killers who you won't forget easily. It's also made with very impressive production values for an indie horror, from camerawork to music, and Bedford and his team should be commended for what they've achieved on their budget. A perfect antidote to the usual Christmas fluff – just wait until after you've had your turkey dinner and Nan's dozed off.

SUBSPACE RELAY

ALL THE NEWS FROM THE WORLDS OF STAR TREK WITH IAIN ROBERTSON



To Boldly Yeoh

After months of speculation, CBS has finally announced the principal cast of Star Trek: Discovery.

Michelle Yeoh – Captain Georgiou
The most high-profile of the cast, Yeoh has been one of the biggest names in Asian cinema for decades. In the West, she's of course best known for **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon**, **Tomorrow Never Dies** and more recently, Netflix's **Marco Polo**.

Rather than being a member of the Discovery's crew, Yeoh is playing the captain of the U.S.S. Shenzhou, another starship which will feature heavily in the first season.

Yeoh was the first cast member announced, when **Wrath of Khan** director Nicholas Meyer (who's serving as a writer and producer on **Discovery**) let slip that she'd be appearing in the show.

Doug Jones – Lieutenant Saru
Jones is well-known to genre fans, mainly through his work with director Guillermo del Toro. He's appeared in many of his films including both **Hellboy** movies, **Crimson Peak**, **Mimic**, and **Pan's Labyrinth**. He's also appeared in the likes of **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, **Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer**, **Batman Returns**, and **Legion**.

His character, Lieutenant Saru, is part of a new species for **Star Trek**. CBS hasn't announced any details, but Jones is experienced at working under heavy prosthetics, so don't be surprised if the actor's unrecognisable. Like Spock, Dax, and T'Pol before him, Saru is a science officer.

Anthony Rapp – Lieutenant Stamets
Best known for appearing in both the Broadway and film versions of **Rent**, Rapp is an award-winning stage actor. In film, he's best known for appearing alongside Russell Crowe in **A Beautiful Mind**. Genre fans may possibly remember him from his guest spot in the **X-Files** episode *Detour* (we don't, but then we're rubbish. We don't even remember Ryan Reynolds appearing in it and he's dead famous).

Lt. Stamets, is an astromycologist, which is apparently a space fungus expert (we were going to make a 'Fungal Frontier' joke here, only someone at Harvard's already written a paper on the subject with that title) and Starfleet science officer on the Starship Discovery. He's also confirmed to be a **Trek** series' first openly LGBT character, which is (we're guessing) more interesting than space fungi.

Takei Speaks Out Against Trump's Proposed Muslim Registry

One of President-Elect Trump's (god, it still hurts writing those words) more controversial policies is his stated desire for a registry of the Muslim population in the United States. Whilst he's by no means committed to it, it's something he mentioned frequently during campaigning, and like most of his policies, it's badly thought-out, impractical, and offensive to any decent human being. Worse still, members of Trump's team have compared it - favourably - to the country's internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

George Takei has taken particular offence to this comparison. He spent a large portion of his childhood in one of the camps, and has spent many years bringing attention to this little-known dark chapter of recent American history. Recently, he's helped produce an award-winning Broadway musical called **Allegiance** about it. And yes, he's fully aware of the ridiculousness of that.

In a recent piece for the Washington Post, Takei spoke about internment and Trump's plans:

"'National security' must never again be permitted to justify wholesale denial of constitutional rights and protections. If it is freedom and our way of life that we fight for, our first obligation is to ensure that our own government adheres to those principles. Without that, we are no better than our enemies."

"Let us also agree that ethnic or religious discrimination cannot be justified by calls for greater security. During World War II, the government argued that military authorities could not distinguish between alleged enemy elements and peaceful, patriotic Japanese Americans. It concluded, therefore, that all those of Japanese descent, including American citizens, should be presumed guilty and held without charge, trial or legal recourse, in many cases for years. The very same arguments echo today, on the assumption that a handful of presumed radical elements within the Muslim community necessitate draconian measures against the whole, all in the name of national security."

Bryan Fuller talks STAR TREK: DISCOVERY

Last week, STARBURST caught up with Bryan Fuller, prolific US TV screenwriter and showrunner, most recently for the much-missed **Hannibal**, to talk about his next major assignment, the long-gestated TV adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel **American Gods**. You can read our full interview in the New Year when **American Gods** airs. Fuller has also been busy creating and, until last month, showrunning the long-awaited new **Trek** TV series, **Star Trek: Discovery**. In this exclusive taster for our chat, Fuller talks **Trek**...

On why he is no longer Showrunner on **Star Trek: Discovery**... *"Ultimately, I couldn't do what CBS needed to have done in the time they needed to have it done and part of that is because of my responsibilities on **American Gods**. It was a difficult situation but it felt like that was the best resolution."*

On the status of the work he undertook before he departed... *"I've written drafts of the first two episodes and the storyline for the first season so I'm not sure what will happen with them – I leave them in other people's hands. I won't be involved in the production and I won't be involved in post-production. The three people that I cast before I left have all been announced and I was really excited about Michelle Yeoh being our first Captain that we see in **Discovery**. I'm curious on where the casting will go from this point forward, but if they need any assistance or opinions they have my number or they know where to get hold of*

*me. I hope that **Star Trek** continues to inspire!"*

On his continuing love of **Star Trek**...

*"I love the philosophy of **Star Trek** and I what it represents in terms of being able to have a conversation about progress on this planet and how we need to come together as one people to continue into the future. So I miss being able to platform that conversation off of what Gene Roddenberry created."* | MC

Original Bridge Console Restored

An iconic prop from the Original Series has had a makeover for a new exhibition.

The Enterprise's main bridge console - home to the helm and navigation stations most famously manned by Sulu and Chekov - survived in the hands of private collectors since the series ended, and had fallen into a state of disrepair with only the wooden shell remaining. Most of the console's iconic features such as the chronometer and the red alert signal were missing, along with the majority of buttons and switches.

Now, for its appearance at an official 50th Anniversary exhibition in Seattle, called **STAR TREK: Exploring New Worlds**, it's been lovingly restored to its former glory. Almost.

"*I decided to leave the surface as is, scratches and all,*" exhibition curator Brooks Peck told reporters. "*For the buttons and indicators, I realised that we could build reproductions with LEDs and circuitry that would take up far less space than the original equipment.*"

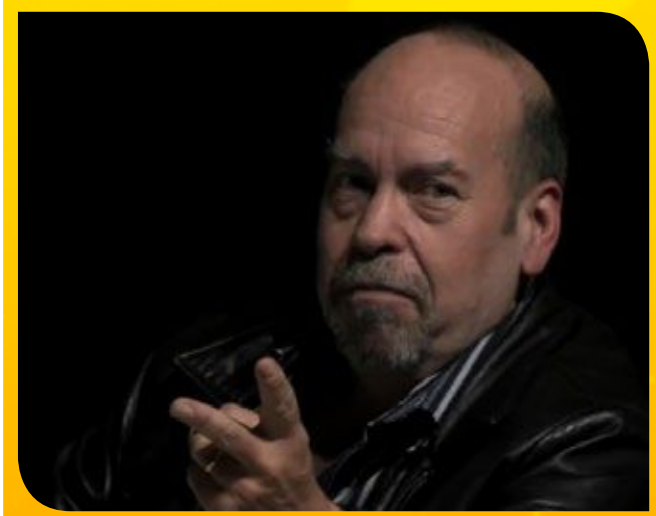
With the help of a company called TOSGraphics.com, replicas of the original features have been lovingly created and added to the console. The results can be seen at the exhibition, which runs until March next year.

It's the latest iconic prop from the series to be preserved for posterity. Earlier this year, the Smithsonian unveiled the beautifully restored filming model of the Enterprise. It now lives at Washington's National Air and Space museum alongside the Wright brothers' flyer and memorabilia from the Apollo missions.

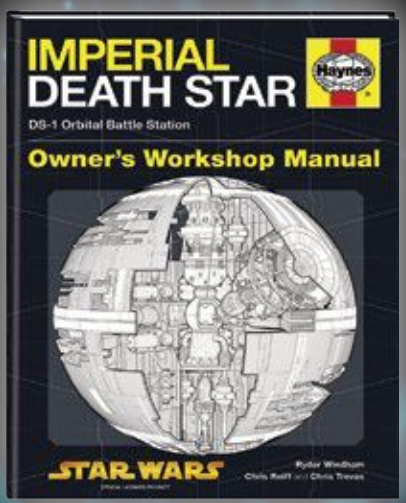
Farewell to Ron Thornton

He might not be the most recognisable name, but **Trek** fans will know the work of digital effects pioneer Ron Thornton, who passed away on November 21st, aged 59. After an early career working on the likes of **Doctor Who**, **Blake's 7**, and **The Tripods**, the Bristol-born artist moved to America and was co-founder of effects company Foundation Imaging.

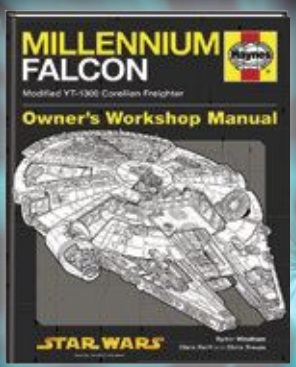
The company's first gig was on the early seasons of **Babylon 5**, where they created much of the show's landmark CGI. **Trek** then beckoned, and Ron worked on over twenty episodes of **Voyager** and **Enterprise**, as well as **Star Trek Nemesis** and the director's cut of **The Motion Picture**. In 1999, alongside the rest of the effects team, he received an Emmy nomination for **Voyager**'s 100th episode, *Timeless*. Most notably, Ron was instrumental in bringing one of **Voyager**'s most memorable aliens to life: Species 8472.



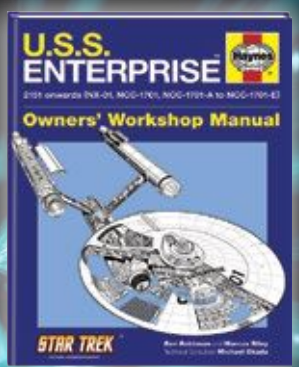
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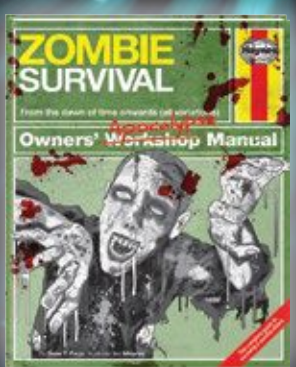
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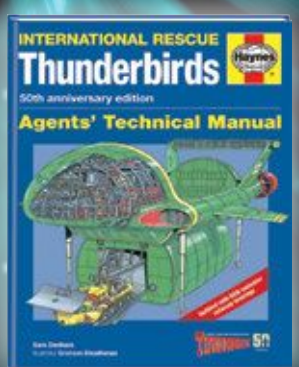
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THE TREKOLOGIST

From the desk of the STARBURST Trekologist B. JONES



Good news, **Trek** fans - CBS Action is making December 27th National Spock Day. It's like Christmas all over again but involves ten hours in front of the TV, a set of pointed ears and a bath load of Plomeek soup.

The day starts at 9am with *The Squire of Gothos*. The Enterprise meets a powerful mischievous god-like entity who is determined to have some fun at the crew's expense. Not exactly a Spock-heavy episode, but it does show his qualities as both a leader and a tactician.

If you jump to 10 o'clock, we get *Devil in the Dark* in which Spock mind melds with a living rock. Bet that gave him a heck of a headache afterwards.

Just after midday, *Amok Time* is the best way to start the afternoon. Not only do we get to visit Vulcan for the first time and witness ancient wedding rituals but we also get to see some epic duelling between Kirk and Spock and some ingenious medical practices from Dr McCoy. If you don't blink you will even get to see Spock break into a grin at the end of the show - but for logical reasons, of course!

Journey to Babel just one hour later introduces Spock's parents - the willowy human Amanda and the brusque 100% Vulcan Sarek. That's not all, fact lovers - we also get a basic course in Vulcan internal anatomy, such as the position of the heart and the fact that Sarek's blood is T-negative.

The Enterprise Incident is all Cold War spying wrapped up in science fiction. Spock plays Mata Hari, Kirk plays dead, Spock steals the Romulan Commander's heart, and Kirk steals a cloaking device.

By 3:30pm, you will be ready for *All our Yesterdays*, in which Spock and McCoy find themselves trapped on the ice-bound planet Sarpeidon with no chance of rescue as they have travelled into the planet's past and right into its ice age. Found by Zarabeth, Spock begins to revert to an earlier incarnation where he is jealous, violent and enjoys eating meat. There are two sequels to this story in the official **Star Trek** novels entitled *Time for Yesterday* and *Yesterday's Son* written by A. C. Crispin. Both continue and add to this storyline in a good way.

At 4.40pm, we jump back to season one with *The Enemy Within*. There are two Kirks running around the Enterprise and to stop loony Kirk from killing spineless Kirk, we get to see the first use of that famous Vulcan nerve pinch. Invented, according to Leonard Nimoy, to save him from a lot of fight scenes. Good choice.

More Vulcan physical differences are revealed in *Operation Annihilate* next. Apparently, Vulcans have an inner eye that closes in very bright light. This is jolly handy as it saves Spock from spending the next two years aboard the starship blind, after McCoy's not-so-effective cure.

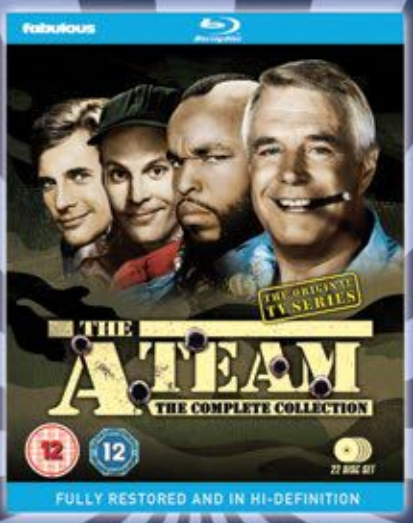
At 7pm, it's time for third season opener *Spock's Brain* and it's time you won't get back! Spock has his brain stolen to run a computer and then has it put back in his head again. It may feature our favourite Vulcan but an hour spent with an Andorian Slime Devil would be more fun.

The evening is rounded off with *The Immunity Syndrome* and *The Galileo 7*. Two excellent episodes that feature the tensions of being half-Vulcan within a human crew and what an amazing science officer Spock actually is. It is the use of logic that saves the day in both cases, although McCoy is sure that Human emotional responses also played their part. Pretty much Spock in a nutshell then, really!



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The STARBURST MOVIES of the YEAR

As the year draws to a close, the STARBURST writers have had their customary all-out battle to decide the favourite films of the last twelve months. It was a closely fought contest for the top spot, but as usual, there are some surprises along the way. So grab the popcorn and settle in for the ultimate countdown of the best of 2016...

40. THE HATEFUL EIGHT



An all-star ensemble come together for Quentin Tarantino's most recent film, which centres on a couple of bounty hunters and other no-good sorts who wind up stranded in a stagecoach stopover. However, as ever, nobody is quite what they seem. Undoubtedly, this is Tarantino at his most Tarantino, and this wonderful slow-burn experience showcases a true master of his craft. | AP

39. THE SURVIVALIST



Minimalist post-apocalyptic thriller **The Survivalist** is one of the very best British films of this past year. After a total economic collapse leaves the planet in disarray, it's kill-or-be-killed on a daily basis here, and Martin McCann's titular Survivalist finds his world thrown upside down when a desperate and starving wife and daughter land at his proverbial door. | AP

38. WE ARE THE FLESH

It may not be for everyone, but Mexican horror **We Are the Flesh** – aka **Tenemos la carne** – does well with the small $400,000 budget at its disposal. In a world that's gone to the dogs, two desperate sisters find themselves having a chance at survival... which, as ever, comes at a potentially worrying and dangerous cost. | AP



37. OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL

Serving as a prequel to 2012's so-so-at-best **Ouija**, Mike Flanagan's **Origin of Evil** is far, far superior to its predecessor. Taking the first movie's stitched-up Doris Zander and seeing her as a young child fifty years prior to the events of the first film, this second **Ouija** effort is one that caught many off guard with its impressive quality, strong scares, and well-orchestrated tension. | AP



36. THE SHALLOWS



In terms of keeping it minimal, nothing else on this list is likely as minimalistic as **The Shallows**. When a shark bite leaves Blake Lively stranded on a heap of desolate rock 200 meters from shore, she has to plot a way to make it back to safety before the tide rises whilst also keeping an eye on the still-lingering great white. Tense, taut, and beautiful to look at, this is one of 2016's finest thrill rides. | AP

35. SWISS ARMY MAN



Since the cinematic **Harry Potter** franchise concluded, Daniel Radcliffe hasn't been shy about taking on challenging roles. No one would have believed, however, that he could turn in such an amazing performance as a corpse. **Swiss Army Man** achieves what **Weekend at Bernies** failed to do: make a decomposing body actually funny. | EF

34. HELL OR HIGH WATER

A slow-burn crime caper that's also a Western is always likely to draw in a certain audience, but **Hell or High Water** is a marvellous, masterful movie that will appeal to any and all who give it a chance. With a cast headlined by the fantastic trio of Jeff Bridges, Chris Pine, and Ben Foster, this delicious, well-crafted effort is one that may have slipped under the radar of some, but it's certainly worth hunting down in our books. | AP



33. HARDCORE HENRY

Playing like a video game in a music video in a found footage segment of an intense spy movie that's disguised as a brutal actioner, **Hardcore Henry** is nothing if not unique. For adrenaline junkies and those looking for frenetic, frantic, fucked-up action that whizzes along like an extra hot curry on a Saturday night, look no further than this little number. | AP



32. CREED

Despite being a **Rocky** spin-off movie with Sylvester Stallone returning to his most famous role, **Creed** is Michael B. Jordan's picture. Jordan's Adonis Johnson, the son of Apollo Creed, is an unproven boxer looking to forge his own path whilst also living up to his father's legacy. What could've easily been a by-the-numbers dud is an engaging, considerate, emotional rollercoaster that has audiences taking the hits along with its core players. | AP



31. BATMAN VS SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE



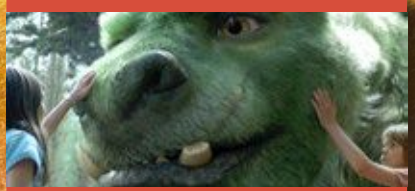
Following **Man of Steel**, DC upped their game and added a battle-hardened Batman and Wonder Woman into the mix, fusing imagery from two of the publisher's greatest stories. The resulting battles were a fan's dream realised - with more to come in 2017. | RoP

30. EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!



Everybody Wants Some!! is the film that 2016 needed – a charmingly infectious, giddily entertaining dose of 1980s nostalgia. Richard Linklater's elegantly meandering story follows the shenanigans of a group of baseball players over the weekend before college begins. The relatively unknown ensemble nail the team's boisterous, playful dynamic as Linklater triumphantly captures the joy of being young and carefree. | LC

29. PETE'S DRAGON



We know: we didn't want to see this liveaction/animated effort redone either. But by word, **Pete's Dragon** manages to be just as good, if not better, than the 1977 original. With Oakes Fegley fantastic as the titular Pete, and with a great supporting cast of Bryce Dallas Howard, Karl Urban, Wes Bentley, Robert Redford and genre icon John Kassir, not to mention the CGI-created Elliot, this one's easily one of the more heartwarming, magical movies of 2016. | AP

28. THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

Desperate survivors battle to stay alive in a world ravaged by a fungal virus which turns its victims into blood-crazed 'hungries' in Colm McCarthy's bold, striking, intelligent, terrifying exploration of what it means to be human, questioning our right to remain the dominant species on our planet. Eminently re-watchable and with a gold-standard cast, this is the gift that keeps on giving. | PM



27. TALE OF TALES

Filmed entirely on location in Italy, Matteo Garrone's first English language film is a rich, vividly realised portmanteau of witty, grisly stories based on the tall tales of Neapolitan poet Giambattista Basile. Three beautifully presented stories full of kings, queens, ogres, monsters – and a giant flea – dovetail to create a strikingly original fantasy fairy tale that, despite its brusque European starkness, is anything but a grim experience. | PM



26. NINA FOREVER

The Blaine Brothers have a talent for inventing absurd situations then mining them for humour. This follows a young man haunted by his dead girlfriend, who appears every time he has sex with his current girlfriend. Silly and sarcastic, **Nina Forever** is legitimately the funniest rom-zom-com since **Shaun of the Dead**. | EF



25. UNDER THE SHADOW



Babak Anvari's Persian language film is everything horror cinema should be. It marries timely gender ideology with the horrors of the conflict of Tehran in the '80s to create an atmosphere that is engulfing and absorbing to watch... and that is before the frights set in. Terrific performances, hair-raising scares and a perfect evocation of the anxiety of the era. | JB

24. HIGH-RISE



Ben Wheatley divided audiences once more with his adaptation of J. G. Ballard's classic novel. Arguably more apt than ever, the story of class divides within a new multi-storey apartment building strikes more than a few chords with viewers. It also boasts a stunning cast with Tom Hiddleston, Jeremy Irons, and Sienna Miller all excelling. | MU

23. I, DANIEL BLAKE



The filmmaking return of an irate Ken Loach, back to present a scathing indictment of the British government and welfare system. Bolstered by terrific performances and a meticulously researched script, Loach's work is sure to leave you with a lump in your throat and anger in your belly. In many ways, **I, Daniel Blake** isn't just a film; it's a war cry for change. | FMB

22. TRAIN TO BUSAN

Proving that the genre isn't yet (un)dead, Sang-ho Yeon's kinetic, frenetic zombie thriller maintains a relentless pace throughout while still finding time for a little emotional complexity. With action sequences that rival **World War Z,** this surprise South Korean hit stakes a claim for the most exhaustingly awe-inspiring film of 2016. | JT



21. NOCTURNAL ANIMALS

A gorgeously designed, intricately plotted and unbearably tense nail-biter, **Nocturnal Animals** is as visually sumptuous as it is narratively rich. Tom Ford's deliciously dark mystery-thriller features two outstanding supporting performances from a superbly gruff Michael Shannon and an unrecognisably villainous Aaron Taylor-Johnson. It's a provocative delight that is certain to stay with you. | LC



20. SUICIDE SQUAD

Critics hated it, but audiences loved this anti-superhero entry from DC. Maybe they just weren't ready for the morally ambiguous antics of DC's version of the Dirty Dozen sent on a mission they shouldn't survive. All this plus the scene-stealing Harley Quinn and the definitive screen Joker we've all been waiting for. | RoP



19. 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE



This is vastly superior to its predecessor, bearing little to no resemblance to its half-brother - 2007's **Cloverfield** - and this works to its advantage in more ways than one. It ditches the distracting 'found footage' trope, and opts for a more ever-changing, character-driven story that is bolstered by an intriguing premise and dynamite performances from a minimalist cast. | RP

18. THE REVENANT



Stunning to look at, breathtakingly tense from beginning to end, Alejandro G. Iñárritu's award-laden frozen epic opened 2016 with a bang, and finally provided everyone's favourite Leo with his overdue Oscar. If you haven't yet seen it, you really need to as soon as possible. There's even a bear. Good god, is there a bear. | JT

17. THE NEON DEMON



Cliff Martinez's score for Nicolas Winding Refn's latest bit of cinematic gorgeousness will likely outlive the film by many years, but **The Neon Demon** is a delight for the eyes. Any single frame is worthy of hanging above your mantel. Ignore the plot and dialogue, and treat Refn's movie like the music video it so very obviously is. | NS

16. THE WITCH

While the mainstream horror genre seems to go over the same ol' jump scares, Robert Eggers' unshakable film drags you into places you feel you should not be. Incredibly faithful to its 17th century New England setting, this film burrows under your skin and leaves a lasting scar on your mind. | JB



15. MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

One of the most surprising movies of the year, **Midnight Special** delivers an intriguing experience layered with mysteries that aren't all resolved or explained, yet it doesn't insult its audience. Jeff Nichols has crafted a beautifully rich and deep piece of science fiction that is ambitious, entertaining, and terrifically acted throughout, most notably the electrifying Michael Shannon. | RP



14. ANOMALISA

Charlie Kaufman writes idiosyncratic narratives. There is no denying that. This stop-motion animation is not only a visually beautiful and beguiling treat, it also has a genuine depth that deals with detachment and introspectiveness. It's almost ironic that one of the most psychologically challenging and outright human pieces of cinema to come out this year doesn't actually have one in it. | FMB



13. BONE TOMAHAWK



A serious western draped in horror and with Kurt Russell at its core? Yes, that concept had us sold, too. Luckily, S. Craig Zahler's movie was more than just hype and a sounded-good-on-paper idea. With cannibals, minimal-yet-instantly-quotable dialogue, and some gore-tastic moments, **Bone Tomahawk** is most certainly the real deal and a terrifying, tense, delicate affair. | AP

12. ZOOTROPOLIS



2016 is going to go down as the year Disney got woke. After decades of racially problematic content there's not enough room to list here, the animation studio made the most understandable and touching film on relations we've seen thus far. It's also cleverly funny and a complete joy from start to finish. | NS

11. KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS



We are living in a golden age for animated cinema and **Kubo and The Two Strings** is perfect proof. Travis Knight's painstaking stop-motion masterclass is instilled with a poignant story, outstanding visuals and a spiritual ideology that is unforgettable. Spellbinding from immediately enthralling start to heartfelt finish. | JB

10. DOCTOR STRANGE

Genre favourite Benedict Cumberbatch was perfectly cast as the highly skilled yet incredibly talented Doctor Strange. This hit movie captured the surreal weirdness of the original comics, updated it for modern tastes and proved yet again that in Marvel's hands, superhero movies aren't going away any time soon. | EF



9. STAR TREK BEYOND

With **Into Darkness** epitomising the sophomore slump, **Beyond** lived up to its name and became the most originally fun take on the franchise since **The Voyage Home**. Letting Simon Pegg co-write the film led to plot-appropriate fan service. An action sequence's use of the Beastie Boys' *Sabotage* further cements **Beyond**'s place in the **Star Trek** universe. | NS



8. THE GREASY STRANGLER

If ever there was a left-of-centre cinematic curveball, then this is it. Jim Hosking's horror comedy is as dark and surreal as it comes, as if John Waters and Taika Waititi had some bizarre, greased-up love child. Brilliantly repetitive and propelled by Andrew Hung's score, it's an unforgettable future cult classic. | MU



7. ROOM



The strength of Lenny Abrahamson's claustrophobic drama **Room** lies in the subtlety of the direction and performances. Tension and discomfort build with barely perceptible ease as you never really get a handle on where the story is taking you. With Oscar winner Brie Larson and breakout youngster Jacob Tremblay, **Room** is a film as unsettling as it is utterly engaging. | JT

6. HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE



Beautiful, stunning, mesmeric, quirky, reaffirming, and grin-inducing. Those words can be applied to any Taika Waititi movie to date, and **Hunt for the Wilderpeople** is no different. A rich, quaint experience with Sam Neill on fine form and Julian Dennison with a truly breakout performance, the minimal plot of an odd couple on the run in the bush is an absolute joy to behold. | AP

5. GREEN ROOM



World famous bald person Patrick Stewart turns in a stunning performance as a skinhead ring-leader in this tense horror thriller. The tale of an American punk rock band who stumble upon a murderous band of Neo-Nazis, this clever movie is effortlessly performed as well as spectacularly violent in places. | EF

4. DEADPOOL

After being butchered big time in 2009's abominable **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**, the wisecracking Merc with the Mouth finally got the big screen treatment he deserved. While not being big or grand in scale, it nevertheless managed to deliver the Deadpool movie audiences have been waiting for, and it allowed Ryan Reynolds to prove once and for all that he truly IS Deadpool. | RP



3. CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

For the past eight years, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has been going strong and delivering on all cylinders with each new outing. Not only did **Captain America: Civil War** feel like a living, breathing comic book, but it also felt like Marvel Comics has been elevated to a whole new medium. | RP



2. STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

Ever since **Return of the Jedi** came to a close, we've craved to know the cinematic future of Messrs Skywalker, Solo and co. What J. J. Abrams gave us here was a perfect balance of new and old as we were reminded of the heart, sincerity, drama and humour that made the **Star Wars** series so special to us in the first place. | AP



1. ARRIVAL



Harking back to classic works like **Contact** and **Close Encounters**, **Arrival** sees Denis Villeneuve presenting to us an emotionally compelling vision of first contact that has less to do with aliens but more about humankind's reaction to them. That humanity is embodied by Amy Adams, who delivers a raw and powerful performance that goes down as one of the best seen this year. This is a powerful look at what makes us all human, joining the ranks of ambitious sci-fi films like **Gravity**, **Interstellar,** and **The Martian**, reflecting the maturation that the big-screen sci-fi genre has undergone in recent years. | RP

As I suggested back in Issue 420, 2015 was a tough act to follow. 2016, by comparison, was lower key, with decent genre flicks slightly thinner on the ground. Not that there were no future classics around, but after the immense boost given to the genre by the Christmas release of **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**, the pace did slow down somewhat. Consequently, if I found it difficult to isolate any discernible shifts or trends last year, then this year has been even more of a conundrum. Weirdly reflecting the unstable political landscape of the last twelve months, genre cinema has been terribly hit and miss. Sure-fire hits have bombed, and some movies that were rather niche managed to find unexpected audiences.

Sequels and remakes struggled again this year. In particular, the unexpected box office failure of **Star Trek Beyond** delivered an unwelcome bump in the road for the previously power-housing reboots. Not exactly what Paramount needed for the fiftieth anniversary. Thankfully, it fared better in our poll than it did with the public.

Marvel Studios again managed to provide some stability to the sequel market with the crowd-pleasing reward that was **Captain America: Civil War**, then followed that up with the psychedelic antics of **Doctor Strange**. A more niche entry, yet still avoiding the dud that we all fear will drag this monstrously successful run of films off its winning streak one day (hopefully distant). Although it has to be said that if you were a studio wanting plenty of bang for your buck then **Deadpool** was the only entry that gave Marvel anything to worry about. **Deadpool** kicked some serious ass in what should have been the year of DC. Instead, **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** ended up at a measly number 31 in our chart, with the **Suicide Squad** only just scraping into the top 20.

Genre arthouse seemed to be gathering momentum in 2016. Films such as **The Neon Demon**, **Anomalisa**, **The Greasy Strangler**, **Room**, and **High-Rise** all managed to find an audience and stand out in their own rights, despite more limited releases.
2016 has indeed been a potpourri. A veritable pick 'n' mix. But what it has lacked in consistency or discernible trends, it has made up for with some unique movies such as the low budget horror **Green Room**. A quality horror movie that punches way above its weight, it's a firm STARBURST favourite power-housing into number 5.

Whatever my misgivings are regarding this year, for me, 2016 will always be the year of **Arrival**, a stunning piece of intelligent sci-fi that is long overdue. It's at number 1, and I could not be happier to see it there. A well-deserved win for a movie that defines what makes sci-fi an opiate for so many of us. I can only hope that 2017 delivers another movie of this calibre. **Blade Runner 2049,** perhaps? I really hope so...

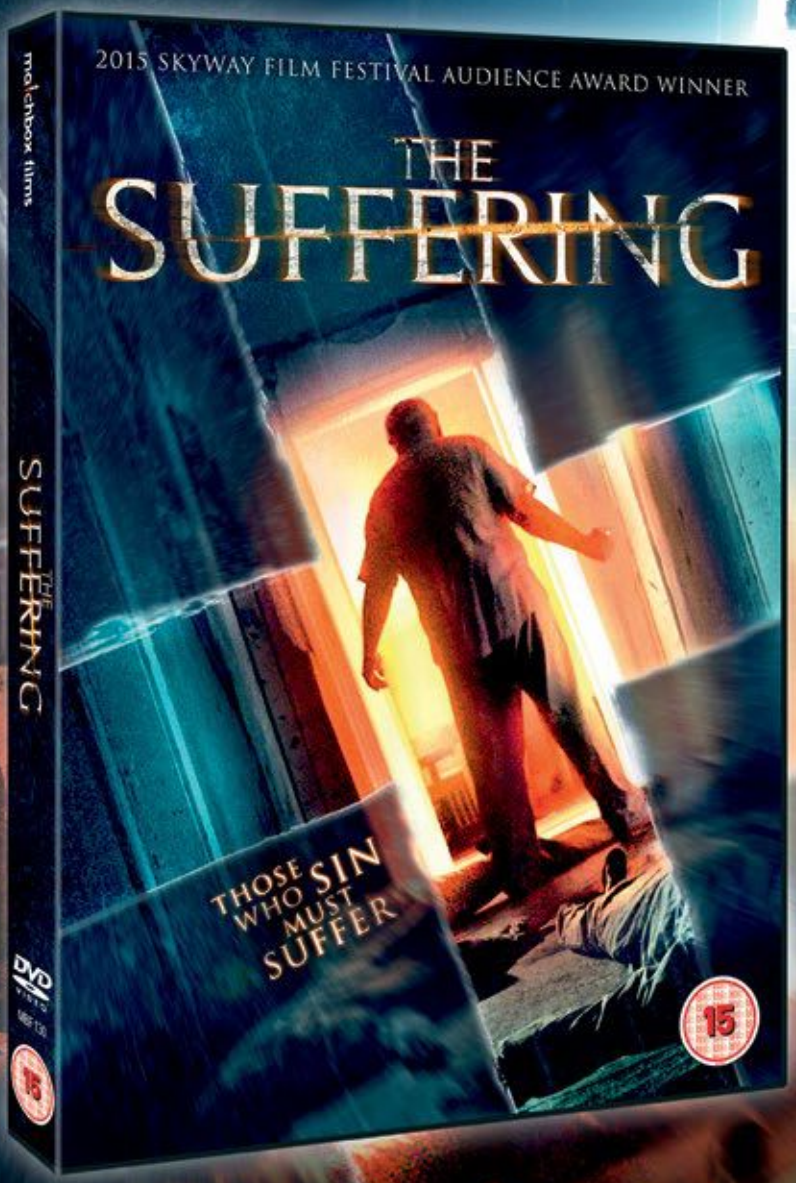


Jordan Royce
EDITOR

Words by Andrew Pollard, Ed Fortune, Ryan Pollard, Paul Mount, Ford Maddox Brown, John Townsend, Robin Pierce (RoP), Nick Spacek, Luke Channell, Jack Bottomley, and Martin Unsworth.

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Choose a Sequel

THE LONG-AWAITED FOLLOW-UP TO THE MASSIVE HIT MOVIE TRAINSPOTTING IS ALMOST UPON US. STARBURST TAKES A LOOK AT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM T2…

BY COURTNEY BUTTON

The heavy beat of drums. Trainer-clad feet hammer against a pavement. 'Choose life…' The year was 1996 and *Trainspotting* had hit cinemas. Based on the début novel of the same name by Irvine Welsh, it told the story of Mark Renton and his friends, a gang of heroin addicts who lived in Scotland. The novel, almost a series of linked short stories, was based on Welsh's own life and his experiences as a drug addict and was written in phonetic Scottish accent. Both the novel and the film were released to heavy praise and have since become classics. Its soundtrack, featuring tracks from Blur, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed and Pulp, is still widely hailed as one of the best of all time and its poster still adorns the walls of student bedrooms around the country.

Trainspotting was Danny Boyle's second feature, after crime thriller *Shallow Grave* and a wealth of TV movies and episodes of series such as *Inspector Morse*. It confirmed a talent that was hinted at with his début and would help to cement his status as one of England's best directors. Boyle has since directed many more features, an adaptated *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre, won a Best Director Oscar in 2008 for *Slumdog Millionaire* and has had films nominated in various categories since, and directed as well as co-ordinated the opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics.

Trainspotting has been unfairly subjected to criticism that it glamorises heroin use and heroin culture, but it is hard to be convinced of this if you have actually watched the movie. It is a *realistic* depiction. "*Take the best orgasm you've ever had, multiply it by a thousand and you're still nowhere near*." This is how the feeling of taking heroin is described by Renton. But the crippling effects of addiction are also shown. The characters steal and rob to fund their habit, one of





them contracts AIDS, in a deleted scene another has both his legs amputated, and Renton's withdrawal scene shows him enduring physical and psychological torture as his body tries to cope and adjust. The worst character is one who doesn't do drugs, he's just a violent psychopath. It is not a film that makes you want to become a heroin addict. The film shows an unloved, vilified, and underrepresented part of society and shows them to be human. Though they are heroin addicts who are often driven to criminal acts, they are still people who are capable of love and friendship, funny people who could turn themselves around. They aren't just a statistic or a newspaper headline to be tutted at or eradicated.

A sequel to *Trainspotting* has been discussed for a very long time. There had been a disagreement between director Danny Boyle and star Ewan McGregor which stalled any progress for several years. In 2000, Boyle directed the adaptation of Alex Garland's popular novel *The Beach*; Boyle subsequently worked with Garland when directing his scripts for the brilliant zombie horror *28 Days Later* and the massively underrated science fiction film *Sunshine*. *The Beach* was a film with a bigger budget and higher expectations than Boyle had worked on before. The production was interfered with by the studio, causing Boyle to step away from bigger budget productions for a while. In the novel, the main character of Richard is played by an English man but this was changed for the film to an American played by Leonardo DiCaprio, still riding a wave of popularity and fan adulation from *Titanic* in 1997, the idea being that he would bring in a lot more ticket sales through star power. Ewan McGregor, who was a regular collaborator with Boyle starring in *Shallow Grave*, *A Life Less Ordinary* and, of course, *Trainspotting*, was originally tipped for the role but was pushed out in favour of DiCaprio. This caused a falling out between Boyle and McGregor and they haven't worked on a feature together until now with *Trainspotting 2*. Boyle has also said that he was waiting for the actors to appropriately age so that they could reflect the aging of their characters. The sequel couldn't go ahead without the original cast returning and now, after twenty years, they have got the old gang back together.

Welsh has written several books about the characters; *Skagboys*, published in 2012, is a prequel to *Trainspotting* and most recently *The Blade Artist*, published in 2016, features Francis Begbie in the present day as a successful sculptural artist. However, *Porno*, published in 2002, is pretty much a direct sequel to *Trainspotting*. Set several years after the closing events of *Trainspotting*, *Porno* picks up with the characters of Renton, Sick Boy, Spud, and Begbie and includes a new character named Nikki Fuller-Smith. Other characters from *Trainspotting* also appear, including Alison, the fellow heroin addict whose baby dies of infant cot death, now in an on/off relationship with Spud, and Diane, Renton's former underage girlfriend, now a housemate of Nikki who also attends the same university. In the novel, Renton has been living in Amsterdam running a club night with a friend and struggling through a stagnating relationship. At the end of *Trainspotting*, he betrayed Begbie and Sick Boy, and to a lesser extent Spud, by stealing several thousand pounds that they had made by selling heroin. Spud is trying to keep straight so that his strained relationship with Alison and their child can continue. He decides that he will write a non-fiction book about Leith. Sick Boy travels back from London to Leith and begins working at his aunt's run-down pub. He starts putting plans together to change the pub around. He also starts to work on a porn film to earn some more money and make a name for himself as a pornography director. Begbie has been incarcerated where he received packages of gay porn and when released is determined to find the culprit. He also begins working with debt collectors. Renton gets wrapped up in the pornography plan as he decides to make more money and starts work on the film. He travels back to Scotland, strikes up a relationship with Diane again and tries to work while staying out of the way of the vengeful Begbie.

However, *Trainspotting 2* is not a straight adaptation of *Porno*. For one, how could it be? The novel contains a lot of explicit sex scenes that wouldn't be possible for a film of this budget and aim, and it's probably not something that Boyle is interested in anyway. *Trainspotting 2* is also set ten years after *Porno*'s timeline, bringing this story up to date with our modern day. With the original

























being very much firmly grounded in its time, there doesn't seem to be much point in making *Trainspotting 2* a period piece, even if that period is only ten years ago, and making the original cast look ten years younger. Things are more interesting if we give them a little distance and a little more time. You get a lot more change over twenty years than you do with ten and also the feelings and unsettled issues between the characters due to the ending of *Trainspotting* will be compounded with the extra time.

Plot details have been kept pretty well under wraps, with the cast and crew managing to keep very tight-lipped. We know that *Trainspotting 2*, also titled *T2*, takes some of its plot from *Porno* but, as mentioned, is not a straight adaptation. At the moment, the amount of crossover they have is only really known to the filmmakers. Details are sparse with only vague notes released about the returning cast and some themes that the film will cover. The first full trailer gives us a glimpse into the world but again refuses to reveal any solid plot secrets, leaving you to infer details from the brief snippets.

We can see that, true to *Porno*, Renton has been spending his time in Amsterdam and that something brings him back to his home town in Scotland where he will meet up with his old drug-taking pals. Begbie has been serving time in prison and is released while Renton is back and it does seem that the violent psychopath still holds a grudge due to Renton stealing his money. Sick Boy seems to be running the pub or at least working there. Diane appears to be doing well for herself, set up in an important-looking office job, rather than the studious university student that she is in *Porno*. Spud is still struggling by with a confused look on his face and potentially considering suicide, a point taken from *Porno* in which he considered ending it all so that Ali and his child could have his life insurance money. There doesn't appear to be any sign of Nikki Fuller-Smith from *Porno* and this makes sense; there isn't a lot of point in adding in another new main character as the film is going to be looking at the characters from *Trainspotting* and what has changed with them in twenty years rather than preoccupying itself with a new character. What is most interesting is a shot that sees Renton and Sick Boy standing in front of some very serious-looking men, like something akin to *Shallow Grave*, which looks like they are getting themselves into more trouble than they can handle. Then there are the drugs; piled up in bags in a fridge, cut into lines and snorted and being injected into the veins, in the lives of Renton and pals drugs are very much a day-to-day reality. The film looks to have the kinetic and energetic feeling and camerawork that is Danny Boyle's style. We can't really guess whether the iconic soundtrack from *Trainspotting* will be matched yet. The trailer starts off with *Born Slippy* by *Underworld*, a song synonymous with the first film, a blast of reassuring nostalgia, and then during the second half, *Silk* by *Wolf Alice* is used. It also looks like it is cementing

itself firmly in the present and with how things have changed. Where before Mark told us to '*Choose life, choose a career, choose a family*' now he is telling us to '*Choose Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and hope that someone, somewhere cares*'.

It is of course impossible to say whether *Trainspotting 2* will have the same cultural and lasting impact that the original film had and certainly it has a lot to live up to. Sequels are often subject to diminishing returns but with all the significant cast and crew returning twenty years after the first, it definitely feels like *Trainspotting 2* is being made for love and art rather than a cynical cash in. Hopefully, it is going to give a dose of nostalgia to the fans who love the characters and were there when *Trainspotting* first came out and as well as those who have discovered the film since and it should also appeal to a new generation, catching a moment again in 2016 like it did in 1996.

Choose Life. Choose to see if *T2: Trainspotting* can live up to the legacy left by its predecessor. Choose to see whether Danny Boyle, John Hodge and the cast can work the magic that you know they are capable of creating. Choose to see *T2: Trainspotting*.

T2: TRAINSPOTTING arrives at the cinema on January 27th, 2017 in the UK and March 10th in the US.







THE CULT OF PERSONALITY



BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

AS THE NEW YEAR LOOMS, WE TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN'S MULTIPLE PERSONALITY THRILLER SPLIT...



Psychology and cinema have always had an uneasy relationship, be it Norman Bates' maternal vengeance, Patrick Bateman slipping into the madness of a self-absorbed society, Jack Torrance axing the wrong questions or Michael Myers taking a sibling squabble to extreme lengths. It seems that films, as well as many other art forms, have taken a perverse satisfaction with characters that are not exactly well adjusted. Still, in this mad, mad, mad world, who can blame some for going a little bit crazy now and again? The trick is to be occasionally silly but not let yourself go full-on Joker... you *never* go full Joker. That being said, it may not be so easy when you have more than one person in that mind of yours, let alone 23! Well, such a situation is the compelling subject for M. Night Shyamalan's (no, keep reading) latest foray into fractured psyches and thrilling twists.

After spending nigh on fifteen years struggling to recapture the fire displayed in *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*, M. Night Shyamalan has become a little bit of a butt for many jokes. Be it his (admittedly pretentious) cameos in the past, increasingly silly twists or the (downward) spiralling quality of his features, people seem to have taken an unhealthy obsession to tearing the guy down before his latest has even arrived in cinemas. Now, we can all agree that meta-budget garbage like *After Earth* and *The Last Airbender*, as well as *The Happening* or *Lady in the Water* deserved the scorn but as of late Shyamalan has gone back to dark places, where he feels most at home. Last year's low budget handheld horror *The Visit* may not have been a masterwork but it saw Shyamalan return to lower budgets and better territory.

Shyamalan's ability to shock and construct atmosphere is what at one point had him heralded as 'the next Steven Spielberg', so his return to a more stripped back, less expensive and more sinister trajectory is just what the doctor ordered for a filmmaker/writer who genuinely has lots to offer us. The proof being his latest offering in *Split*, which in its synopsis alone does enough to tantalise your taste buds for an unhinged and psychological thriller. The film focuses on a man called Kevin (James McAvoy), who has 23 different personalities. As you can imagine, this makes him pretty unstable and when he is forced by his own constantly altering mind to kidnap three teenage girls, something even more twisted starts to happen. As his captors fear their unpredictable abductor, Kevin begins to develop a final personality which is far worse, far more evil and almost inhuman.

From the single mind of Shyamalan, *Split* could finally be the film that sees the director return to the surprising, riveting and unsettling power of his early form. The director has called this the most challenging film of his career to make and it has been labelled a 'thematic sequel to *Unbreakable*', so it is clear that Shyamalan is determined to pull the rug from under audiences again and alter our perceptions of what he is capable of. Offering a mixture of Hitchcockian thrills and eclectic psychology, with added dashes of *Manhunter* and *10 Cloverfield Lane*, *Split* is an exciting prospect and at nearly two hours in length (the longest of



Shyamalan's films thus far), there is plenty of time to cower, embrace, and fear in the hopefully taut experience playing out before you.
And going by the chill-inducing trailer, taut is one of many words to describe what could be an early highlight of the New Year.

Originally set to star Joaquin Phoenix (who co-starred in *Signs*), contractual issues instead saw the incredibly talented James McAvoy cast as the film's central figure Kevin; going by what we have seen thus far, it is official, Professor X has well and truly lost it! McAvoy is no stranger to playing diverse roles, with his turn as office worker-come-skilled assassin Wesley Gibson in Timur Bekmambetov's *Wanted* allowing him to express both pressured everyman and confident badass and his absolutely anarchic portrayal of junkie cop Bruce Robertson in Jon S. Baird's Irvine Welsh adaptation *Filth* being the proof that McAvoy is perfectly cast here. In fact, his role in *Filth* bears certain similarities to the more extreme characters of Kevin's personality, with us having already seen glimpses not only of a young nine-year-old but a classy lady, meaning McAvoy will don a female dress once again as he did in parts of *Filth*. The presentation of Kevin will either make or break this feature and we can safely say that from what we have seen thus far, a shaven headed and fully unleashed McAvoy will give us a performance to well and truly remember. God only knows what Kevin's final personality - named only 'the Beast' - will come to be onscreen but judging by his other persona's drawings of this Beast and the snippets of death, physical transformation, and destruction shown thus far, we can safely say we should expect the unexpected - especially considering Shyamalan's penchant for the narrative twist.

Joining McAvoy in the film will be a cast that consists of lesser - known names in cinema. Portraying the three female captors, who must try and find a way to survive and escape their kidnapper, we have Anya Taylor-Joy (who recently impressed as Thomasin in Robert Eggers' lingering horror *The Witch*) as Casey, Haley Lu Richardson (*The Last Survivors*) as Claire, and Jessica Sula (Grace Blood in E4's *Skins*) as Marcia. From early impressions, it looks like Taylor-Joy's Casey will take on more of a leading role, as these three women are kidnapped from their car and taken to a very creepy looking bunker of sorts (which evokes that aforementioned *10 Cloverfield Lane* vibe). The main narrative will indeed be the potentially dangerous journey as these ladies try to navigate the complex web that is Kevin's mind and find a way to survive and escape their situation. However, the extent of Kevin's condition also intrigues, with a suggestion in the trailer that one of Kevin's personalities may take an unhealthy (not that any of this is considered role model behaviour) and almost romantic shine to his three









victims. But could their fate be sealed with 'the Beast' arriving? And what will Kevin's mental (and perhaps even physical - though Taylor-Joy has said the film will have no supernatural element) transformation into 'the Beast' mean? This character-centred film sounds like a godsend for such a concept, which potentially sees a core cast small in number but large in personality and substance, as we see our victims try to manipulate a kinder persona of Kevin and secure their safety or escape. Also joining the fray is Betty Buckley (*Carrie*, *Frantic*, *The Happening*) as Dr Karen Fletcher, who will no doubt be integral in revealing the true extent of Kevin's dissociative identity disorder.

Split just seems to scream potential and with *Foxcatcher*'s West Dylan Thordson handling scoring duties and *It Follows*' Mike Gioulakis as cinematographer, Shyamalan has truly assembled a crew who know their way around creating a chilling aesthetic for a film. There is no telling the depths that this concept may reach, nor to the extent that this enigma of a central figure could go with our female trio. Other subplots that could pan out include a hunt for Kevin and an insight into his therapy sessions with Dr Fletcher. Whatever the case (or should that be case study?), there is no denying that this film is the most exciting project Shyamalan has helmed in years.

Principal photography began back in November 2015, with reshoots occurring earlier this year but after débuting at Texas' Fantastic Fest on September 26th, the early word of mouth is positive for a film that could be set to split (ahem) audiences. With an early 78% positive score on Rotten Tomatoes (as of writing, that is) and the early reviews comparing the film to Hitchcock, praising McAvoy's 'amazing performance' and further denoting the slow but assured comeback of this once promising but recently parodied filmmaker, all is looking good as the film gets nearer and nearer - much like Kevin's dark 24th personality. We would love nothing more than to see this director flourish once again on the twisty road back to his darkest, most entrancing form and from the looks of his latest film, that could well happen. We all love a career renaissance (see recent examples in Michael Keaton, Robert Downey Jr. and Matthew McConaughey) and with *Split*, we could see just that. *Split* is a most appealing idea with many possible directions and we can't wait to see what Kevin's mind has in store for an audience ready to be surprised once again.

SPLIT sneaks into the car seat of UK and US cinemas and kidnaps audiences on the January 20th, 2017.



REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



ARRIVAL

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DENIS VILLENEUVE / SCREENPLAY: ERIC HEISSERER / STARRING: AMY ADAMS, JEREMY RENNER, FOREST WHITAKER, MICHAEL STUHLBARG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When it comes to cinema, it is always good to see a film that either blows away expectations or shows you something that is truly breathtaking or original. There are many times over the century-plus history of this marvellous medium that this has happened and those works of art that have accomplished this have gone on to live forever. Well, after enjoying some great reviews for his unsettling Prisoners and pulse-quickening Sicario, director Denis Villeneuve aims to do just that next year with a sequel to a film that does exactly what we have just suggested, in Ridley Scott's influential sci-fi masterpiece Blade Runner. However, before Villeneuve helms Blade Runner 2049, he brings us this sci-fi offering, based on Story Of Your Life, the short story by Ted Chiang, but is this as good as some have suggested or is it a worrying misfire before this auteur heads to a dystopic LA?

Alarm sets in as twelve unidentified large spacecraft appear at random positions across the earth; in an attempt to communicate with these beings and discover their intentions, the US military contacts talented language expert Louise Banks (Amy Adams) and pairs her with theoretical physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner). These two minds lead a mission to discover the aliens' intentions and in the process calm the brewing panic of the human race. As Bradford Young's engrossing mist-strewn cinematography and dark interiors recall Ridley Scott's Prometheus, this film in many ways reminds of the more subtle and human touch of Gareth Edwards' Monsters as well as the aspiration of the films of Christopher Nolan. Arrival is not only worthy of the hype that surrounds it but it is an engaging, intelligent and impressive accomplishment.

Eschewing the memory of his work on the dreadful A Nightmare on Elm Street remake, Eric Heisserer's screenplay for this feature is ambitious, thoughtful, deep and almost alarmingly timely. As the unpredictable and incredible narrative unfolds, this alien picture (which some have compared to Contact) comes to shock and twist your perceptions, with a narrative that never shakes the connection, while not holding back on being a thrilling piece of entertainment in its own right. Arrival is a proper science fiction film that rewards fans of intelligent storytelling through tackling some felicitous themes of humanity segregated by fear and paranoia, closed mindedness of those in power, media driven moral panic, and the worth of life and language. This is a film that makes advanced linguistics exciting, for goodness' sakes! And when its twists and turns do set in in during the third act (which - similar to the last act of Interstellar - may be an acquired taste to some), you will more likely than not find yourself thirsty to re-visit Arrival at your earliest convenience, to dive back in and discover the deeper depths of this story.

This is aesthetically-transportive, thanks in part to the aforementioned visuals and a score by Jóhann Jóhannsson which is chill-inducing at points and meshes equally well with the poignant moments of the narrative, as well as the contemplative and mysterious vibes. Backing this audiovisual impact and compelling plot is a cast of characters who are interesting and, most importantly of all, connect with the feelings of the audience. Amy Adams is absolutely excellent as Louise and if she does not earn herself an Oscar nomination at the very least for her leading performance, then, frankly, the Academy deserves to be vaporised by aliens. Her character may be the heart and soul of the film, but she is well paired with a brilliant Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker is most welcome as Colonel GT Weber, a military man bound by duty but with a more open mind not often seen in this kind of character onscreen.

As the world undergoes some angry changes and segregations widen, a film like Arrival feels scarily appropriate, and leaves you feeling awed and a little humbled. We cannot say to you that you will love this movie - after all, we all like our sci-fi in different shapes, sizes and doses - but we can safely say that a film this rich and rewarding deserves be labelled a modern day classic in the genre and, for that matter, cinema as a whole. This is a movie that benefits from patience, focus and understanding - much like its central visitors - and in one fell swoop, Villeneuve shows that he gets it. This writer for a while has questioned the need to return to Blade Runner, but after seeing Arrival, consider his mind changed, Villeneuve can nail it. Works like this are why we love going to the movies. Captivating.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED 9

ACTUAL 10



FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DAVID YATES / SCREENPLAY: J.K. ROWLING / STARRING: EDDIE REDMAYNE, KATHERINE WATERSTON, DAN FOGLER, ALISON SUDOL, COLIN FARRELL, EZRA MILLER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Harry Potter has come a long way since The Philosopher's Stone spilled from the mind of then-aspiring author J.K. Rowling in The Elephant House café in Edinburgh. Rowling's success with her literary creation has been multiplied by the following film adaptations, starting with 2001's Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone and ending with 2011's Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows - Part 2. Since this point, Potter has found success on the stage and in a variety of formats, so naturally it would be myopic to suggest that this world would never return to the big screen. Which brings us neatly onto Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them, a spin-off-come-prequel to the Potter franchise inspired by Rowling's 2001 book that she wrote under pseudonym Newt Scamander - who became a figure in the lore of this realm of wizardry. The book essentially looked at the various magic creatures and events surrounding the Harry Potter universe and, considering that this feature is the first of five films in a new pre-Potter film series, hopes are riding high on this being a big success.

Set back in 1926, this film sees magizoologist Newt Scamander (Redmayne) arrive in New York, with a briefcase full of fantastical and magical creatures. No sooner has he arrived, than his own business is delayed, as he bumps into a No-Maj, which is basically the American term for muggle, or non-magic person, called Jacob Kowalski (Fogler) and some of his magical creatures escape. This gains the unwanted attention of Porpentina 'Tina' Goldstein (Waterston), a worker at the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA). But more is going on in New York than a couple of escaped beasties, as a dark magic is lurking, threatening to upset mankind and wizardkind alike.

Much like Duncan Jones' Warcraft: The Beginning earlier this year, Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them is a film that fans of the universe it inhabits will absolutely love. Rowling, in her screenwriting début, does occasionally bamboozle you with jargon (some of which is delivered so rapidly you find yourself asking "what was that they just said?") and the structure of this big screen tale does over-excitedly and untidily jump around, with certain subplots being less expanded than others. However, one constant in this feature is the goodwill (even in the face of some truly dark moments) and Rowling's screenplay is happily imaginative, ideological and thoroughly entertaining. Yes, there is a lot of world-building, but it is a world you are happy to take the time to see grow; the references to Potter are pretty few in number, barring the odd name drop, meaning that this is an accessible step into Rowling's enchanting creation.

Despite falling into the common prequel trend of filling the film to the brim with CGI effects (over practical), and despite some bombastic moments in the latter half, this is an engaging and exciting start to this new series, which comes out swinging far better than the likes of Peter Jackson's The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey. This is largely down to the feeling that Rowling and established Potter director David Yates know exactly where they are going with this, as tantalisingly hinted at with the climactic reveal of the series' big baddie, which we won't discuss any further to avoid spoilers. Not to mention the fact that the creatures themselves really are creative, character-instilled and fantastic innovations that suggest there is plenty of wonders left for fans and newcomers alike to experience in this world. Then there is the political recoil of the narrative, which is a timely caution on the dangers of segregation, the oppressive nature of certain propaganda, man's destruction of wildlife and how a climate of fear - in this case spurred on by the devious deeds of one dangerous wizard with a lot of power - can lead to panic and thus destruction.

However, as well as the politics and the fabulous creatures on display, a strong aspect of the film is also its characters, who on the most part are very charming. Redmayne is almost child-like as Scamander, whose love of the natural world and uneasiness around people sees him as a reclusive but compelling figure. The character brings with him a level of British eccentricity and - despite some whispered lines of dialogue being slightly unclear - Redmayne brings an innocence and appeal to the central figure, who strikes up a chemistry with the great supporting players. Katherine Waterston is brilliant and wholly believable as Tina and her character really develops over the course of the film, coming to see past the fear of her magical realm and understand the bigger picture. Dan Fogler, as hard working New Yorker Jacob, who dreams of having his own bakery, is an absolute scene stealer at times and genuinely funny. There is also some foreboding support from Colin Farrell as mysterious MACUSA Auror (a highly trained officer to us muggles) Percival Graves, while Ezra Miller gives a damaged and very dark performance as the troubled and abused young man Credence, whose character (and subplot) comes to get a bit muddled despite Miller delivering a strong turn in one of the darkest areas of the film.

Filled with wonder, a giddy eagerness for the future and a plethora of talented actors (from Ron Perlman as greedy Goblin Gnarlack to Alison Sudol as Queenie, Tina's lovable sister, this is a film that really lays the groundwork for what hopes to be a promising new avenue in this universe. True, the excitable tendencies of the writing and the more hectic areas of plotting do not always ensure a smooth ride, but it is an intriguing start that introduces promising characters (and a propitious future villain) and plants the seeds for some areas of interest to come; Newt and his briefcase of magnificent magical wildlife are sure to come calling at the cinema again soon, and we look forward to seeing where he heads next.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED 7

ACTUAL 8



I AM NOT A SERIAL KILLER

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: BILLY O'BRIEN / SCREENPLAY: BILLY O'BRIEN, CHRISTOPHER HYDE / STARRING: MAX RECORDS, CHRISTOPHER LLOYD, KARL GEARY, LAURA FRASIER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The modern audience is obsessed with, and fearful of, psychopaths and sociopaths. Popular works like We Need to Talk About Kevin, NBC's Hannibal - not to mention tragedies like Columbine - have helped build a culture of fear and fascination around the murderous loner. Billy O'Brien's I Am Not a Serial Killer is an ambitious peek behind the curtain of adolescent angst and damaged psyche, which zones in on the nature of murder and monsters.

Max Records (Where the Wild Things Are) plays John Wayne Cleaver, a misfit who works with his mum (Laura Fraser) at the town morgue and is being treated by a psychiatrist (Karl Geary) for murderous fantasies. When bodies start turning up, John begins to investigate for himself, slowly stepping closer to his own dangerous desires and the potential secrets of his neighbour (Christopher Lloyd).

If you haven't read Dan Wells' novel, there's a whopper of a twist that would be criminal to expose, suffice to say I Am Not a Serial Killer isn't simply a nifty killer-thriller. Focusing on the characters, O'Brien, with writer Christopher Hyde, play this out as a genre-savvy character study with some big questions on its mind.

It's a smart move to turn murder into a kind of character death we really don't want to see, and it's a credit to Records' sparky, emotionally-damaged but loving, loner that we get so involved. It's also a credit to the writers that things never get too ridiculous, even when the humour and last act seem to draw subtly from '80s silliness. Here is a film that is successfully equal parts tense, horrifying, surprising, and heartfelt. Where O'Brien's Scintilla failed on cohesiveness and intrigue, I Am Not a Serial Killer steps its game up. It's a hunt-the-killer film which transforms as soon as it starts to wear thin, but it's also a monster movie with elements of home invasion and psychological drama; a Stephen King adaptation crossed with We Need to Talk about Kevin, peppered with the black comedy tone of Fargo. Essentially then, it's a cluster-fuck of character study and genre ideas, which has miraculously been delivered in the form of a quiet snowy thriller. Even the look of the film feels loaded with genre significance: Halloween-inspired POV shots give Records' and Geary's screen-relationship a Loomis/Myers vibe, whilst the Phantasm-tinged soundtrack helps nail the '80s B-Movie feel.

Sure, O'Brien is a bit scattershot with the dialogue by the finale, but it's an engrossing feature which grants Christopher Lloyd one of his best roles in years, whilst letting Max Records flaunt his undeniable talents as a sympathetic lead. Horror fans will really enjoy this fresh examination of the nature of monsters.

SCOTT CLARK

EXPECTED 4
ACTUAL 8



MOANA

CERT: PG / DIRECTORS: RON CLEMENTS, JOHN MUSKER / SCREENPLAY: JARED BUSH / STARRING: AULI'I CRAVALHO, DWAYNE JOHNSON, RACHEL HOUSE, TEMUERA MORRISON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

2016 really has been a dream year for Disney. Already reaching $5 billion at record speed - and that is before Rogue One - the House of Mouse truly is still the king of the castle. So does the 56th film in the Walt Disney Animation Studios output continue this winning trend of barnstorming pictures? Yes, it absolutely does.

This Polynesian adventure sees young girl Moana (Cravalho) aspire to go out across the oceans from an early age, despite the warnings of those in her tribe. But as a toddler, the ocean chose Moana for a very special quest that would see her deliver a relic to an island goddess, with the help of a demigod called Maui (Johnson). Now, years later, Moana is called back to that quest, which will see her strength and her heart well and truly tested. Moana is another enjoyable adventure that feels like a seaboard Pocahontas blended with Hercules (especially in how the film uses real mythology - in this case Polynesian - and Disneyfies it) and The Emperor's New Groove, with moments of spellbinding seafaring splendour akin to Ang Lee's The Life Of Pi.

The story may lack the emotive grasp of Disney's best work but it has a very spiritual feeling to it, offering a sweeping journey of destiny that asks you to follow your soul's direction. From the opening moments, the cultural setting is engrained in this narrative and Moana really is a brilliant journey to be taken on. Yes, in many ways it is traditional Disney - a scene-stealing chicken sidekick and a 'listen to your heart' core - but this tradition meshes with a change of pace setting and themes of environmentalism (the sea is an actual character) and gender liberation (Moana is set to be the next leader of her tribe and is not so much interested in finding a partner as she is the world).

There is a lack of a real villain aside from Jemaine Clement's colossal gold-loving crab Tamatoa, who does feel like he scurried in from the world of The Little Mermaid (something not unnoticed by the filmmakers - it's referred to in the post-credits scene). Instead, the antagonist of this film is really nature thrown out of balance by a well-meaning individual. However, it is all a joyous burst of fun that boasts imagination in the set pieces, even as the story rushes a few elements (such as Maui's backstory) and makes a convenience out of others (the sea is Moana's friend but only helps at certain points). Kids will adore certain aspects like the aforementioned battle with the singing self-centred crustacean, while adults will also be swept away by the visuals, which really are the film's greatest achievement. The animation is among the best ever created by the studio and certain sequences absolutely floor you with their beauty, colour and majestic power. From the sand grains to the anthropomorphic sea (which recalls the Magic Carpet in Aladdin), this is animation as masterful as it is wonderful. The songs are fantastic, with Cravalho surely destined to gain Oscar attention with 'How Far I'll Go' and Johnson showcasing his range with a great song called 'You're Welcome'. Then there is the soulful scoring by Mark Mancina, which only adds to the proud cultural identity of this film accomplished through thorough research and passion.

There are some fine supporting characters like Gramma Tala and Heihei (Alan Tudyk) - the intellectually challenged rooster that accompanies our heroes on their journey. The voice work is enthused with Cravalho and Johnson striking up a brilliant chemistry and the characters being well placed in this fast-moving and fun adventure.

Moana is unspeakably lovely to look at and very entertaining to watch; Disney continue to be at the top of their game.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED 8
ACTUAL 8

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME VIDEO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



THE INCREDIBLE HULK: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

BD / CERT: 12 / CREATOR: KENNETH JOHNSON / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: BILL BIXBY, LOU FERRIGNO, JACK COLVIN, CHARLES NAPIER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno-starring The Incredible Hulk ran for five seasons between 1978 and 1982, and now the entire run of episodes have been given a HD spruce up by the guys at Fabulous Films. But is this a show that's simply best left as a nostalgic memory, or does this release bring new life to an old favourite?

Plot-wise, we all know the drill by now. Genius scientist Bruce Banner (Bixby) is exposed to gamma radiation, resulting in him turning into the imposing, erratic Hulk (Ferrigno) whenever he gets angry. And remember, you won't like him when he's angry. Poor, tragic Banner has to pretend to be dead as he frantically tries to find a cure for his little issue of transforming into a giant green rage monster. Adding further to his problems, Bruce is regularly pursued by Jack McGee (Jack Colvin), a nosy journalist who wants to find out the truth behind who the Hulk really is.

As was par for the course for shows of its time, The Incredible Hulk as a series is largely made up of one-and-done type adventures, although obviously there's the overarching greater narrative of Banner trying to keep the Hulk at bay. That's not to say that the show doesn't hold your attention throughout its episodes, though, for despite there being expected filler episodes from time-to-time, there are two constants that make each and every outing an engaging one: Bill Bixby's Bruce Banner and Lou Ferrigno's Hulk.

The whole trauma of Banner's battle with his hulking inner demon right is something that's so hard to interpret, but even to this day it's Bill Bixby that's the standard bearer when it comes to what we hope to see from the more recent big screen incarnations of the Green Goliath. To his Bruce Banner, Bixby brought a true sense of tragedy as we got to see a man battle his demons in a way that pulled at the heartstrings and brought genuine care and emotion to a series that could so easily just be all about the 'Hulk Smash!' element. That's not to say that seeing the Engine of Mass Destruction popping up to bash the bad guys and save the day at least once per episode isn't great, and the sight of Lou Ferrigno's Hulk is likely to reawaken many memories of afternoons spent hiding behind the sofa.

With this new release from Fabulous Films, each and every episode has been given a high-definition makeover and it's certainly a job well done, for The Incredible Hulk has never looked or sounded – yes, *that* theme tune is still as memorable – any better. The effects of the show may feel a little dated to new eyes these days, but for those longing to revisit a favourite of yesteryear, this crisp new release will bring an added sense of freshness to a show that's so fondly remembered by multiple generations.

One slight niggle with The Incredible Hulk: The Complete Collection is that there are no major new bonus features included – the featurettes and gag reel included here have previously been attached to earlier releases – but that's certainly not a major put-off, particularly for those who haven't got any of the previous releases of the series. Also, it would've been nice to have seen the later TV movies that featured Thor (1988's The Incredible Hulk Returns) and Daredevil (1989's The Trial of the Incredible Hulk) - not to mention 1990's The Death of the Incredible Hulk - included in this set as a nice extra. As a character study, the dynamic between Bruce Banner and his alter-ego has never been better explored than during The Incredible Hulk, and even now Bill Bixby's Banner stands up as one of the greatest examples of bringing a comic book character to life in a live-action setting. Simply put, this new release of an old favourite is smashing. Hulk smashing. We'll get our coat...

Extras: *Three featurettes / Audio commentary on three episodes / Two introductions / Gag reel / Photo gallery*

ANDREW POLLARD

8





ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13 (1976)

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOHN CARPENTER / STARRING: AUSTIN STOKER, DARWIN JOSTON, NANCY KYES, LAURIE ZIMMER, MARTIN WEST / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Assault on Precinct 13 is one of the crown jewels of the career of the truly iconic and legendary John Carpenter. Following his 1974 début with Dark Star, Carpenter gave audiences this thrilling adrenaline rush of a movie just two years later. Often cited by some as an all-time classic of film history, the big question here is whether JC's 1976 effort holds up to this day.

To give a brief summary of the film itself, Assault on Precinct 13 sees a deadly LA gang swearing a blood oath to take out a nearby police station in retaliation for the cops having killed some of their members. Unfortunately for the boys in blue, the station itself – which is actually Precinct 9, Division 13 – is in the process of being shut down and so only has skeleton staff working. The silencers on the gang's guns mean that nobody will be hearing the attack, and the in-the-process-of-being-shut-down nature of the station means nobody will be visiting any time soon. In order to help stem the ferocious attack that looms large from this gang, Austin Stoker's Lieutenant Bishop only has Henry Brandon's Sergeant and Nancy Kyes and Laurie Zimmer's secretaries to support him, and so he has to seek help from some no-good convicts who have had to take temporary refuge in the Precinct during a transportation gig that's been halted due to an ill prisoner. Will Bishop and his crew have enough to keep their attackers at bay, and just how much can they trust the criminals who they're forced to work alongside?

As a story, as a thriller, and as a classic of its time, Assault on Precinct 13 is as good as it's ever been. Full of tension, desolation, desperation, and some performances that still snap as much as they did the first time around, upon a rewatch the film will still rank up there as one of John Carpenter's finest. Halloween proved just why Carpenter is known as 'the Master of Horror', The Fog showed he could craft a delicate classic ghost story, The Thing was a sci-fi horror masterclass, and movies like Escape from New York and They Live were drenched in social commentary and dripping with insta-cool lead characters, but with Assault on Precinct 13, we get to see just how well Carpenter does with an action movie. And quite frankly, the end result here is a film that is unrelenting, grabbing you by the scruff of your neck and dragging you through its 90-minute run time as you watch its central characters doing their best to handle what appears to be inevitable carnage whilst a classic Carpenter score only adds further to the nail-biting as you move ever closer to the edge of your seat.

With this new release from Second Sight, fans of John Carpenter will be delighted with the overflowing special features that are included on this Blu-ray. Some of the extras may have been seen on previous releases, but there are enough added bonuses here to make this a must-have for fans of one of cinema's greatest ever directors. As with any similar chat tracks from JC, the commentary from Carpenter himself here will be the highlight for many, and the entire array of special features included make this feel like the comprehensive edition of a film that often gets overlooked for the likes of Halloween, The Thing and Escape from New York when certain quarters herald the career of John Carpenter. The importance of Assault on Precinct 13, both to Carpenter's career and the moviegoing landscape of its time, shouldn't be overlooked, and here Second Sight have put together a phenomenal remastered release that makes Assault on Precinct 13 feels as fresh and engaging as it's ever been.

Extras: *Audio commentary with John Carpenter / Audio commentary with Tommy Lee Wallace / New interviews with Austin Stoker, Joseph Kaufman, and Tommy Lee Wallace / Interview with John Carpenter and Austin Stoker / 'The Sassy One' with Nancy Loomis / 'Do You Remember Laurie Zimmer?' documentary / 'Captain Voyeur' John Carpenter student short / Radio spots / Trailer / 5 art cards / Bonus CD soundtrack*

ANDREW POLLARD

8



STELLA CADENTE

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: LLUÍS MIÑARRO / SCREENPLAY: LLUÍS MIÑARRO, SERGI BELBEL / STARRING: ALEX BRENDEMÜHL, BÁRBARA LENNIE, LORENZO BALDUCCI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Amadeo (Brendemühl) has just been crowned King of Spain. His reign is going to be extremely short-lived and he's destined to spend practically every moment trapped within the walls of his castle, dictated to by Ministers who definitely don't have his political welfare on their minds. Amadeo cuts a handsome if melancholic figure and the only two people he seems able to trust are his loyal manservant Alfredo (Balducci), who has a disturbingly coital relationship with a watermelon, and his cook Eloisa (Duenas), who briefly becomes his lover. When Amadeo's wife (Lennie) arrives from Italy, there seems a vague hope that Amadeo's circumstances will begin to change, but the peasants are revolting and matters are – quite literally – primed to explode.

Lluís Miñarro is a legendary film producer in his native Spain, and this is his first feature as director (he also co-wrote the screenplay). It's a fantastic achievement, and one of the most surreal, joyous, blackly comic and beautiful to look at historical biopics you're ever likely to see. Yes, it has a slow-moving arthouse tone and there's a lot of contemplative silence between the words, but it's such a gorgeously idiosyncratic piece of cinema that even the silences are captivating. Miñarro and his cinematographer Jimmy Gimferrer are visual magicians, with each shot composed and lit like a painting, indulging in the rich chiaroscuro of the costumes and set design, taking full advantage of the ever-present Spanish sunlight. But one of the most delightful elements of Stella Cadente lies in Miñarro's genius use of music, especially during a wonderful interlude in the second act that is guaranteed to put a smile on even the most jaded viewer's face. It's this kind of savvy but expertly timed irreverence that makes the film such a magnificently unexpected surprise and will make you wish you'd had the opportunity to watch it on a big screen. Highly recommended – this has to be a very late contender for one of the most enjoyable DVD releases of 2016.

IAN WHITE

9



MAID MARIAN & HER MERRY MEN

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: DAVID BELL / SCREENPLAY: TONY ROBINSON / STARRING: KATE LONERGAN, TONY ROBINSON, DANNY JOHN-JULES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Written by Tony Robinson (him off Time Team/Baldrick from Blackadder), Maid Marian ran for four series (plus one Christmas special) between 1989 and '94. One of the most successful children's shows of its era, enjoying huge ratings and winning awards all over the place, this box set brings together every single episode and adds a host of extras to form a truly outstanding collection that fully deserves a place on your shelf. You might need to be quick off the mark if you want to get yourself a copy though – previous DVD releases already command a relatively high price, and this one is a limited edition of just 3000!

The series is probably best described as a farcical semi-musical retelling of the legend of Robin Hood, where Marian is the leader of the Merry Men and Robin's role is reduced to that of a slightly camp tailor. Along with Robin, Marian's sidekicks also include a Rastafarian (played by Red Dwarf's Danny John-Jules), a lumbering simpleton called Rabies, and a hairy beardy little person called Little Ron who has a knack for facing the wrong way at the most inopportune times. On the bad guy side, we have the Sheriff Of Nottingham (Tony Robinson), King John with his taste for torture and all things evil, and Gary and Graham, a pair of buffoons who somehow got themselves jobs as the Sheriff's private guardsmen. Each episode tells a self-contained story and features at least one original song, displaying a huge amount of creativity across the four series.

It's fair to say that the years have been rather kind to the Merry Men. We're all familiar with that crushing feeling of excitedly revisiting things from our childhood only to discover that they really haven't aged well at all, but Maid Marian is one of those rare shows that works just as well today as it did when it was originally broadcast. Kids will enjoy the songs, the jokes about pants, the slapstick pratfalls and general playground humour, while older viewers are sure to get a kick out of the huge amounts of double entendres that will have gone way over our heads when we were youngsters, as well as the countless references to the popular culture of the time.

With some fantastic set design, witty lines and humorous asides flying around like they're going out of style, and a cast who are clearly having the time of their lives, everything fits into place to form one of the most unique and fondly remembered kids' TV shows of all time. Oh, and yes, you can sing along with the theme tune. There's even a karaoke version! Twenty-seven years later and we can still remember all the words without having to look them up...

Extras: *Cast Audio Commentaries, Maid Marian karaoke, Interactive Quiz, Improvised sketches, Photo Gallery, Easter Eggs, Trailers, Compendium booklet by original Maid Marian artist Paul Cemmic*

CHRIS JACKSON

10



ELSTREE 1976

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JON SPIRA / STARRING: DAVID PROWSE, JEREMY BULLOCH, PAUL BLAKE, GARRICK HAGON, PAM ROSE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the umpteen retrospective releases on film, DVD, Blu-ray, and book form - with J. W. Rinzler's insightful official accounts of the production and release of the Star Wars films - you would have thought there might not be anything else left in the tank to provide extra perspective on what any number of geeks have probably researched over the Internet.

However, with help from a Kickstarter crowd-funding campaign and a bit of ingenuity, director Jon Spira has managed to track down some of the key figures behind the supporting roles, with the likes of David Prowse (Vader), Angus MacInnes (Gold Leader), Paul Blake (Greedo), Jeremy Bulloch (Boba Fett), and Anthony Forrest (Fixer) providing their own journey before and after that fateful Summer of 1976 in Elstree Studios.

Inevitably, given the fact that this is more of a documentary that is set outside the circle of completion of Lucasfilm, there are only fleeting glimpses of the production and stills that have probably been seen before. Still, there are some personal recollections in photo and memory from the names above and others, including one anecdote regarding who claimed credit for the infamous Stormtrooper bumping his head as they entered the control room where the heroes located Leia and the tractor beam.

Elstree 1976, on balance, is going to be of interest primarily to die-hard Star Wars fans and people who aren't swayed by various campaigns and Internet stories; in a rather twisted irony, the independent nature of the documentary actually reflects Star Wars creator George Lucas' determination to maintain autonomy when he made the original film, so whether or not he has actually approved of this work remains to be seen. David Prowse does at one point bring up his own detachment from the official circuit with a ban from certain conventions and the current Disney contingent who are refusing to allow him into the inner circle of prestige.

As a long-term Star Wars fan, this writer actually found Elstree 1976 quite an illuminating documentary, if only for seeing some of those character favourites as they are four decades on, and it is enlightening to hear the principal actors talk about their own inside experiences in their various roles. There is a semblance of disappointment at the lack of actual on-set footage with the subjects here, but given that even the official archives are limited to the Making Of montages and the Empire Of Dreams supplement on the DVD release some years ago, it is a faint hope that this might turn up once Episode IX is completed half a decade or so from now in the complete box set that is doubtlessly going to be released.

At 97 minutes long, it is compact and does hold the attention, so it's well worth a look nonetheless.

JOHN HIGGINS

7



UFO: THE COMPLETE SERIES

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: ED BISHOP, GEORGE SEWELL, MICHAEL BILLINGTON, WANDA VENTHAM, PETER GORDENO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's 1980. Men wear comfortable button-up jumpsuits, cars have gull-wing doors, aquanauts wear string vests, and women on the moon sport fetching purple wigs. This is the future as imagined by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson in their ground-breaking 1969/70 live-action science fiction series UFO which finally – *finally* – arrives on Blu-ray looking as if it was made yesterday morning. You really don't need us to tell you that UFO is bloody fabulous, and in glorious, pin-sharp high-definition it looks bigger and better than ever.

In many ways UFO was 'the one that got away' in the formidable Gerry Anderson canon. Misunderstood and underappreciated at the time, its reputation has blossomed across the decades as it's been discovered by increasingly appreciative audiences captivated by Derek Meddings' still-glorious special effects, its inventive storylines and, we're big enough fans to admit it, its occasional po-faced earnestness. This is the story of Earth in the far distant future (well, it probably seemed that way in 1969) under discrete attack by a desperate alien race from a distant, dying world. A top secret defence organisation named SHADO – Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation – is set up and armed with an armada of space interceptors (launched from a Moonbase facility), submarines and ground-tanks to protect the Earth from these surreptitious invaders. SHADO is commanded by Ed Straker (Bishop), he of the infamous bleached-blond hairpiece, who by day poses as the head of a British film studio (in reality Elstree Studios, its exterior now home to BBC TV's Holby City) beneath which lies SHADO's futuristic nerve centre. Across twenty-six colourful episodes, the men, women and machines of SHADO (and sometimes it's hard to tell them apart) battle to stay ahead of the game as Earth's frontline defence against the aliens who, for some reason, tend to come to Earth one whirling-dervish spaceship at a time.

UFO is undoubtedly charmingly dated – as any story which attempts to posit a near-future world is bound to be several decades after the event. There's a stiffness in both the scripts and performances in many of the early episodes (which inevitably led to contemporary critics making snide cheapjack gags comparing the acting to the marionettes of the Andersons' 1960s shows) and in truth, there's little depth to any of the lead characters with the notable exception of Ed Bishop's Straker. Here's a man who is driven and determined to the point of obsession, sacrificing everything in his life – his marriage, his son (in the heart-breaking 'A Question of Priorities') and even, perhaps, his humanity – in pursuit of his absolute dedication to his post as SHADO's head honcho. We're years away from the idea of TV shows with 'story arcs' but a handful of early UFO instalments tackle head-on the bald consequences of the single-minded obsession which has turned Straker into a cold, distant and hard-edged loner who seems more machine than man.

There's little light and shade in UFO; many of the stories seem ponderous by today's standards and if there's any humour (and there's not much) it's creaky and laboured. But UFO is really all about those extraordinary visuals, the thunderingly exciting Barry Gray signature music and thrilling title sequence and an overarching scenario which can't help but captivate and enthral enough to make even the odd seriously tedious episode like 'Conflict' and 'Destruction' worth struggling through. The first seventeen episodes were filmed at MGM's Borehamwood Studios but the series relocated to Pinewood after a five-month break following Borehamwood's closure; the final nine episodes are slicker, faster-paced and even more imaginative (with some new theories postulated about the nature and physiology of the aliens and a greater subtlety in their invasion schemes) but are much more action-orientated and appear to have ditched any attempt at character development in favour of increased spectacle and a few more punch-ups.

Network have absolutely done UFO proud with this sensational new Blu-ray box set. The episodes have been beautifully restored and they look jaw-droppingly sensational, and with a new 5.1 sound mix available they sound pretty damned good, too. There's also a slew of new bonus material. With the majority of the key behind-the-scenes and front-of-camera players no longer with us, Gerry's son Jamie has crafted a charming, if slightly overlong, documentary, 'From Earth to the Moon', in which many of the show's surviving semi-regulars (including Wanda Ventham and Ayshea Brough) and one-off guest stars share their memories of working on the series. Archive interviews, raw film material and two commentaries carried over from the previous DVD releases of the series as well as a frankly astonishing 600-plus page book on the making of UFO by TV historian Andrew Pixley round out a genuinely comprehensive release which finally and definitively does justice to one of the best British TV science fiction shows of all time. It's Gerry Anderson's true crowning glory and you absolutely need it in your life and on your shelf.

Extras: *Documentaries / Audio commentaries / Film material / Archive audio and video material / Image galleries / Souvenir book*

PAUL MOUNT

10





THE POKÉMON MOVIE COLLECTION

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / SCREENWRITERS: VARIOUS / STARRING: VERONICA TAYLOR, RACHAEL LILLIS, ERIC STUART, IKUE OTANI, ED PAUL, STAN HART / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Pokémon Movie Collection brings together the first three Pokémon movies, and as such represents the days when the anime was in its prime in terms of popularity. In the first movie, Ash encounters Mewtwo, a Pokémon lashing out against mistreatment by humans. In the second, he must race to save the world when the legendary birds are thrown out of balance, and in the third, he encounters Pokémon who can bend reality.

The movies themselves are a mixed bag. The first movie might have had a good story going were it not executed so poorly. At several points, it seems like the audience has to take too much for granted to make the narrative work, and it really doesn't hold up to scrutiny. The second doesn't try as much in terms of story but its vision is much better executed. Out of all three, the third is the best in this regard. It has a simple story that still holds up, and unlike the first movie the third manages to pull off the concepts it explores. It is the touching tale of a girl trying to come to terms with loss, and how to move forward.

As a group, the movies are cheesy, harmless fun. Besides a few moments in the first and the third movies, there isn't much going on here but like similar anime of its type they have a goofy charm. Surprisingly, Team Rocket's appearances in these movies serve as the best metaphor for their quality. They don't do much to justify their presence there but they are still entertaining to watch.

This collection was created as a way for Nintendo to celebrate Pokémon's 20th anniversary. During their cinema run, each movie had an animated short before the main feature. These shorts were included in the VHS and DVD releases but aren't included here. It is bad enough that a Blu-ray release somehow contains less extra content than a twenty-year-old VHS release, but this is meant to be a celebration of Pokémon's 20th anniversary. It is baffling that no effort was made in terms of special features. Even simply bringing over the special features from the DVDs would have been better than nothing.

The Pokémon movies are silly fun that are good for diverting your attention (each lasting just over an hour). If the lack of special features or the aforementioned shorts doesn't bother you, then you might want to check this release out. If you would miss those things, you would be better off sticking to older releases.

GARETH EVANS

6





THE SIMILARS

VOD / CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ISAAC EZBAN / STARRING: LUIS ALBERTI, CARMEN BEATO, FERNANDO BECERRIL, HUMBERTO BUSTO, CASSANDRA CIANGHEROTTI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A voiceover begins The Similars, telling us this is no normal night no matter what the characters might hope, and so it turns out to be in this wild and inventive homage to television and movies past.

The setting is one evening in turbulent 1968, in a Mexico driven by social inequality, student protests and political suppression. At a small town's bus station a few hours away from the capital city, we find ourselves with eight strangers stranded in an unnaturally heavy rainstorm, all waiting for their way out. As they hope against hope for the bus to arrive, strange events start to unfurl, with mine worker and expectant father Ulises possibly the cause of it all. With the weirdness building and paranoia taking a tight gripthey turn against each other. To say much else would spoil the delights ahead.

It's a simple set-up, and if you're thinking one that could have been a lost episode of The Twilight Zone then that's wholly intentional on the part of writer and director Isaac Ezban. Taking his cue from classic episodes like The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street, as well as Alfred Hitchcock Presents and any number of paranoid '60s sci-fi thrillers, it stays focused on the bus station and the small cast, the outside world only filtering in through static-heavy radio broadcasts.

Ezban knows his milieu well, both the cultural influences and the socio-political background his story is set against. Working with a drained palette that's mostly black and white, flourishes of colour make their way in to highlight events as well as reinforcing the otherworldliness of what's taking place.

A note of near-hysteria is struck early on and sustained for much of the running time. The Similars walks a fine line between nervy science-fiction and tipping into horror, with one or two moments being effectively grisly stuff. It's a confident film, with tight pacing and a strong control of the material and mood.

As with the finest Twilight Zone episodes, Ezban also strongly works in but doesn't labour the film's underlying messages, here about conformity and acting before we know all the information. There's a constant tone of playfulness and dark humour throughout that shows he's having a lot of fun with the frequent tips of the hat to his inspirations whilst never losing the points being made.

It's highly recommended and is well worth catching, whether you're familiar with the references or not. A fun, witty, and intelligent genre movie, it stands tall against its influences and is deserving of your time.

JAMES EVANS

8



THE SUFFERING

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ROBERT HAMILTON / SCREENPLAY: MARCO V. SCOLA, ROBERT HAMILTON / STARRING: PHIL AMICO, NICK APOSTOLIDES, LIZ CHRISTMAS, ELIZABETH DAWLES / RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 26TH

Henry Dawles (Apostolides) has been hired to appraise an old remote rural estate by an old, infirm but kindly gentleman, Remiel (Amico). As he sets about his business of listing everything, he begins to experience some strange and unsettling feelings. He is troubled by flashes of visions and an irritating scar on his stomach. He also has to avoid calls from a girl he has apparently had a fling with, while pining for his wife. They are brought to a head when he finds the decaying body of a man hanging in one of the outer buildings. Remiel tells him it must have been a 'stowaway', the lodge being an easy place for transients and escaped prisoners. He offers Henry a large bonus to stay and finish his job. As he discovers more about the place, he is drawn into a terrifying world of tortured souls, regret, and internal conflict.

On face value, The Suffering appears to be just another low budget shocker, utilising remote locations and dark attics to create cheap thrills, but investigate further into its creepy surroundings and you'll be pleasantly surprised at how gripping and out of the ordinary it is.

Although the cast are relatively unknown and unproven, there's an assured quality to the performances, particularly the benevolent estate owner played by Phil Amico. The character's soothing presence perfectly wrong-foots us (and the lead) into a sense of security and comfort in the situation, allowing us to be still shocked by later events, even though we know something's amiss.

The pace of the film may not be to everyone's taste, particularly as the story develops with a slow burn, revealing even more twisted elements as it goes along. Fans of more measured, psychological horror will be in their element for the first half of the film, though. The shocks do come later on and are all the more effective for the build-up.

Seasoned viewers will probably work out what's going on mid-way through the film, but that doesn't necessarily spoil the enjoyment of the denouement. The Suffering is incredibly well acted, beautifully shot (making great use of the locations) and manages to build up an eerie atmosphere from the very start. There are times when it wanders from the purely psychological to more tangible threats, and it comes under threat of losing its way, but thankfully, it doesn't stray too far into the predictable and when it's not throwing monsters into the mix, it's a fascinating and absorbing thriller.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

8



FEAR THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON 2

DVD + BD / CERT: 18 / CREATOR: ROBERT KIRKMAN, DAVE ERICKSON / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: CLIFF CURTIS, KIM DICKENS, FRANK DILLANE, ALYCIA DEBNAM-CAREY, ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After an incredibly short first season, the spin-off prequel show to everybody's favourite televisual bloodbath is back, this time with fifteen whole episodes! That's more than double that of the first season and thankfully time for some actual character development.

Having left our core group (consisting of couple Travis and Madison, their respective kids Chris, Nick and Alicia, Daniel and his daughter Ofelia and the man with the plan – and the boat – Victor) afloat Survival of the Dead style at the end of Season One, the story picks up where it left off and wastes no time in proving that being at sea is no safer than being on land.

As we've come to learn on Fear's big brother, when it comes to the zombie apocalypse, the flesh-eating dead are often the least of the survivor's worries, and this fact is heightened considerably as our group do their best to figure out not just what to do next, but how to act next. As the increasingly few remnants of humanity scramble to find resources, transport or anything else they might need to wait out the storm, it's every man for himself leading many of the crew of the ill-fated yacht to begin to question their own internal moral compass.

Of course, there's only so long that the group can hold their position at sea and before long they find themselves in a string of bad situations as they hop from one place to another seeking refuge. Their journey finally leads them south to the Mexican border where it seems that, for a time, they've found the safe haven they've been looking for. But this is Fear the Walking Dead, not Camberwick Green, and they all discover (again and again) that nowhere is safe and nobody is completely trustworthy.

The fact that this second series was given a full season order surely must have felt like a blessing. What a huge shame then that they didn't use it wisely. For the most part, the first half of the season is squandered on 'jeopardy of the week' scenarios as the group land in and out of trouble neatly inside of each 45-minute episode. It's not until the season's midpoint where the group split up that things finally manage to become interesting. With two, sometimes three concurrent stories, the narrative is allowed to breathe and the characters are finally able to start gaining dimension (although not always for the better).

There's no getting around the fact that you can't help but feel that you've seen all of this before. From their time at the Mexican farm (hiding a hoard of zombified family members) to their discovery of working settlements and turf wars, there's plenty of ground being re-trod here. Granted the Mexican surroundings, the subject of faith, and the differing perceptions of what the walking dead actually are make things more interesting, as does the immediacy of the 'event' which led to the decline of mankind. Yet there's only so long that this will maintain a difference between this and its more successful predecessor.

FTWD Season Two leaves us in a much stronger position than the previous season did. Having found its leader (and it's not who you might think) and turned some characters 180 degrees due to the genuinely heartbreaking moments of the penultimate episode, there's a lot to hope for going forward. With one extra episode scheduled for Season Three, we can only hope they use them more effectively next time around.

Extra features include a short making-of for each episode and the short 15-minute webisode Flight 462.

GRANT KEMPSTER

6

AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF AUDIO ADVENTURES BY TONY JONES



Big Finish

A varied set of announcements from Big Finish this month, of which the biggest surprise was a UNIT box set featuring not only modern UNIT (Kate Redgrave and Ingrid Oliver aka Kate Stewart and Osgood) but also 1970s UNIT – Katy Manning as Jo Jones (she did leave to get married), Richard Franklin as Mike Yates, and John Levene as John Benton. Entitled **UNIT: Assembled**, it is out in May 2017.

We've also had details of the sixth **Survivors** boxset, more from the First Doctor **Companion Chronicles**, and Tom Baker taking on the Vashta Nerada in **Classic Doctors: New Monsters Volume 2**. The cast includes Pam Ferris (**Call the Midwife**, **Rosemary and Thyme**).

Tucked away in the news were details of the next box set of **Graceless** stories by Simon Guerrier and the lead characters Abby and Zara are now joined by Amy and Joy, played by Ann Firbank and Sîan Phillips.

Last but far from least are the details for a Seventh Doctor **Short Trips** called **Forever Fallen**. It's by new writer Joshua Wanisko who won the Paul Spragg Memorial Competition to write a story to mark the loss of a much-loved member of the Big Finish team.

R4/4 Extra

As to the BBC's output, Halloween (technically over a month ago) gave listeners a chance to listen again to **The Stone Tapes** and **The Ring**. We are currently getting a Radio 4 Extra re-run of the Paul Magrs/Tom Baker series of **Doctor Who: Hornet's Nest**, and Bafflegab come up again with a first time run for **The Scarifyers: The King of Winter** (a personal favourite).

There's also a ten-part **Book at Bedtime** of a historical novel written 5,000 years in the future. Written by Naomi Alderman, who won the Orange New Writers Award in 2006 (among many other awards), **The Power** is her fourth novel.

Podcast Spotlight

If the world of independent (and free) audio drama is new to you, take a look at **The Cornucopia Radio Show** (**cornucopia-radio.co.uk**), who are based in Yorkshire and like to work with local writers and voices. Their output covers a wide range of styles/genres and there are around sixty podcasts in their backlog, so something for everybody.

Award Season

As the year winds towards the holiday season, thoughts turn to the year that was and the year to come. In the middle of that we have awards.

The Audio Verse Awards started on a forum then moved to Facebook before turning into a reality in 2013. They're focused on celebrating the best of free audio drama across the world. Voting on the semi-finals completed on November 6th and there is no word at the time of writing who the finalists are. Voting is thorough (and time-consuming), and with 722 nominations the process might take some time. Lots of nominations are previewed on the site (**audioverseawards.net**), which is well worth a browse. Past winners cover every angle of production (writing, sound, acting, engineering and everything else) and a vast range of themes.

At the other end of the scale (if there is a scale), nominations have closed for the BBC Audio Drama Awards, and the shortlist has been announced. Among many familiar nominations are four titles in the category of Best Online/Non-Broadcast: Bafflegab's **The King of Cats** (by Paul Magrs), and from Big Finish, **Doctor Who: Absent Friends** by John Dorney, **Doctor Who: Death and the Queen** by James Goss, and **Torchwood: More Than This** by Guy Adams. There are many STARBURST favourites on this list, and the competition is fierce.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: 219 ABSOLUTE POWER
The Sixth Doctor (Colin Baker) helps on an intergalactic archaeology dig that has uncovered a strange sphere covered in an ancient lost language. He and companion Constance Clarke (Miranda Raison) will discover that some things are best left buried. Written and directed by Jamie Anderson (**Terrahawks**).
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31st

+++

DARK SHADOWS: HAUNTING MEMORIES
Four more stories set in the Gothic melodrama world of Collinsport. Read by Kathryn Leigh Scott, Jerry Lacy, Marie Wallace, and Lara Parker (who has also written one of the tales).
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31st

+++

DOCTOR WHO SHORT TRIPS: 6.12 THE HESITATION DEVIATION
Lisa Bowerman narrates (and directs) this month's tale, which involves the Seventh Doctor taking Bernice Summerfield to a planet where their Christmases are just perfect - except this time, something's gone amiss.
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31st

+++

DOCTOR WHO THE EARLY ADVENTURES: 3.4 THE SONTARANS
The First Doctor and companions Steven (Peter Purves, who also voices the Time Lord) and Sara (Jean Marsh) land right in the middle of a battle between the Space Security Service and the Sontarans (Dan Starkey). But do they trust the SSS, who are searching for a terrible weapon deep within the huge asteroid on which they've landed?
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31st

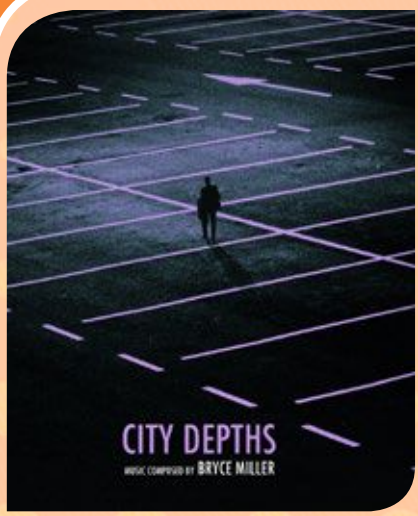
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THE NEW COUNTER-MEASURES SERIES 01
The government-sanctioned phenomenon investigators are back with a new series of adventures set in the **Doctor Who** world. Within the four stories included in the first volume are tales involving going undercover to foil bank robbers, the re-emergence of a lost submarine, a spate of bird attacks, and attempt to thwart a scheme being plotted in a Monte Carlo casino.
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31st

To order, or for more information, head over to bigfinish.com

THE LATEST AUDIO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



CITY DEPTHS

COMPOSER: BRYCE MILLER / LABEL: SPUN OUT OF CONTROL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

From the cover art, featuring a silhouetted man in a carpark, to the purple-tinged cassette, to the liner notes, Bryce Miller's imaginary soundtrack City Depths is absolutely gorgeous in the way it conveys discomfort. As Miller states in the liner notes, the experience he's hoping to communicate with this music is 'a sense of uneasy stillness as the moon casts everything in darkness and shadow'.

City Depths is uncomfortable, but not creepy. A listener won't find themselves petrified, but if one does as Miller suggests and listens to this via headphones 'while exploring the night', there's going to be an awful lot of looking back over one's shoulder and twitchy glances to things seen out of the corner of the eye.

The mood is low-key - opening track Stillness borrows a lot from Boards of Canada - but Miller doesn't work in just one tempo, thankfully. Nor is it all synths, either. Side B's first track, Midnight, is a little more uptempo and exciting, with Miller varying between synth and piano work to make music which has a loveliness to mellow the discomfort.

Side A sets the mood ably, but it's Side B of the City Depths cassette that really takes the idea of 'a sense of uncertainty and haunting fear' under the peaceful surface. Intruder might be the apex. For those who enjoyed Disasterpeace's score for It Follows, the 90 seconds of that track, as well as the similar cut, Void, will give listeners a lot onto which they can latch.

For those who enjoyed WASP, Miller's companion piece to Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy, this is another level. Unencumbered by an already-extant thematic tone, Bryce Miller is able on City Depths to really stretch out and explore quiet avenues and darkened alleys, creating an album of real atmospheric reach.

NICK SPACEK

8



THE AVENGERS: STEED AND PEEL – COMIC STRIP ADAPTATIONS VOLUME 2

DIRECTOR: KEN BENTLEY / WRITERS: PAUL MORRIS, SIMON BARNARD, MATT FITTON, ROBERT KHAN, TOM SALINSKY, JOHN DORNEY / PRODUCER: DAVID RICHARDSON / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: JULIAN WADHAM, OLIVIA POULET, LIZZIE ROPER, MICHAEL KEANE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Earlier this year, Big Finish expanded their range of The Avengers audios – which previously only consisted of remakes of lost episodes from the show's early years – by giving the fans what they wanted. Namely, all-new adventures for gentleman spy John Steed and his most perennially popular partner Mrs Emma Peel. The box set of four stories – loosely based on 1960s comic strips – was a swinging success. Thankfully, this second volume is just as good.

Things kick off with Playtime is Over, which sees a cabal of villainous dwarfs stealing priceless technology. If that sounds a little politically incorrect to you, thankfully writers Robert Khan and Tom Salinsky are savvy enough to keep some twists up their sleeve. The Antagoniser by Paul Morris and Simon Barnard, meanwhile, sees usually placid animals turn rabid thanks to the machinations of a vengeful mad scientist. Richard Earl - Dr Watson from Big Finish's Sherlock Holmes range - makes for one of the box set's welcome guest stars as the brilliantly named Dr Verbatim.

Speaking of which, The Mad Hatter follows Steed and Peel protecting a flighty European princess from some bizarre assassination attempts. The highlight of this one is Princess Helga – the latest in the long line of strong Avengers women – having a crush on Steed. Is that some jealousy from Emma we detect? Finally, The Secret Six is perhaps the most fun of the bunch. One of those subsets of Avengers stories that see the duo trapped in a deadly stately home, it features the most dangerous criminals in Europe attempting to eradicate Steed and Peel once and for all. Spoilers: they're no match for our heroes.

What makes this box set so enjoyable is how it follows on from Volume One in perfectly recreating the style and tone of the Steed and Peel era of the show. The frivolous plots, the diabolical masterminds, the puntastic names (a hat murderer called Tom Bowler, anyone?)... it's all present and correct. Even the distinctive incidental music is lovingly reproduced by Alistair Lock and Steve Foxon. Julian Wadham and Olivia Poulet should also be commended for capturing the characters' sparky rapport without descending into impersonation or parody. It's a minor criticism, but the only thing that doesn't sit right is the number of scenes that end with the villains maniacally laughing. The Avengers was always OTT but, if memory serves, it didn't make a habit of falling back on this old cliché.

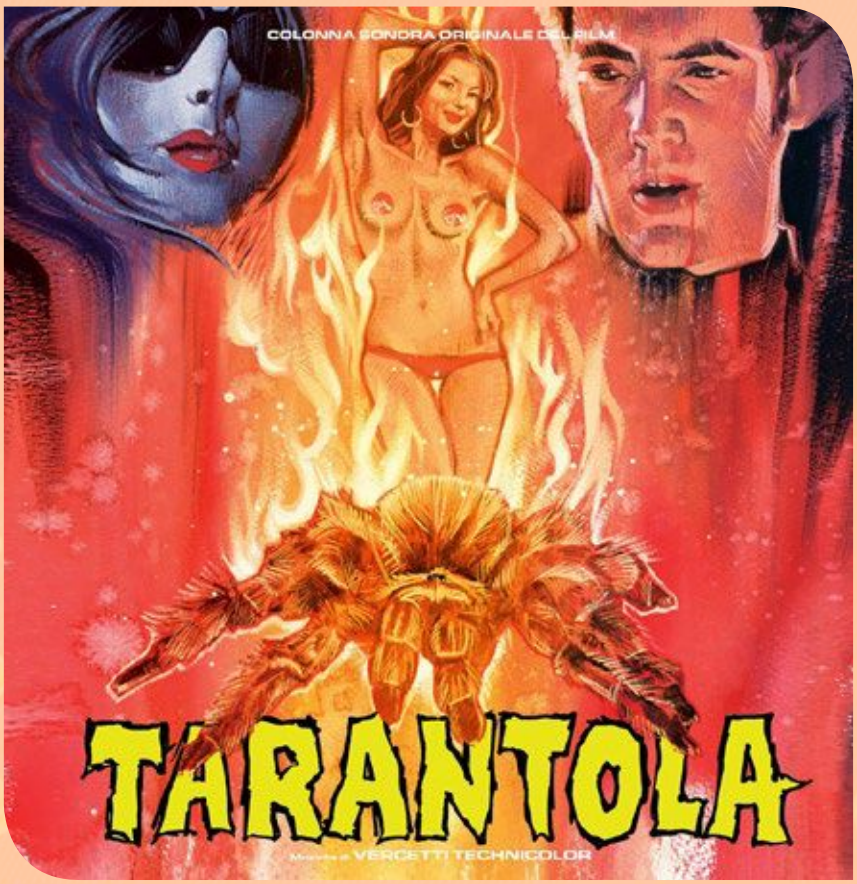
Unfortunately, this box set marks the end of the comic strip source material, so it is possible that this might be it for the rebooted dynamic duo. Hopefully, Big Finish will do the smart thing and create some new stories for the pair from scratch. Hurry back, Steed and Peel – you're needed.

CHRISTIAN BONE

9

OST

THE STARBURST GUIDE TO THE LATEST SOUNDTRACKS BY NICK SPACEK



We literally finished the column last month, went to bed, and woke up to discover that Water Tower Music had released a digital EP of music from HBO's **Westworld** series. Featuring covers of the Rolling Stones' *Paint It Black*, Soundgarden's *Black Hole Sun*, the Cure's *A Forest*, and Radiohead's *No Surprises*, as well as the show's main title theme, it's amazing. The Stones cover has a lot more orchestration than the other three covers, which are basic player piano cuts. They're clever and well executed, but *Paint It Black* orchestrated by Ramin Djawadi is something you need to have in your life. All five tracks by Djawadi are available on iTunes.

Also announced right after we put the issue to bed was the social media tease of Waxwork Records' next release, which will be the score for **Creepshow 2**. That soundtrack famously features music by Yes' Rick Wakeman, as well as Les Reed. It's never before been released, despite people claiming otherwise, so congrats to the label on tracking down some heretofore unavailable spooky tunes.

Further unreleased horror music is available now from Varèse Sarabande. Their new box set, entitled **Little Box of Horrors**, is a twelve-album collection of compact discs, and while it features the compact disc début of a couple of titles, in addition to some reissues, it's the premiere releases about which we're most excited. They consist of **Dracula 2000** by Marco Beltrami, **Pumpkinhead** by Richard Stone, and (going way back) **The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** by Bob Cobert. The set comes in a carrying case with a 24-page booklet written by Randall Larson and is pretty affordable, especially given the scarcity of the titles included.

Lunaris Records' next release will be the music of Vercetti Technicolor, from the film **The Editor**. Actually, more specifically, it will be the music from the movie in the film **The Editor**. Those who've seen the 2014 horror comedy know that they're making a giallo in **The Editor** called **Tarantola**, and all of the music for that film is now available as a nine-song LP from Lunaris, which also includes the end titles for **The Editor**. It's limited to 500 copies, with cover art by the inimitable Graham Humphreys, as well as a poster of Humphreys' **Tarantola** one-sheet from the film. It's synthy giallo goodness, and made us shout with joy when we got the email announcing it. Of all the new releases, this one is our most-highly recommended.

Also most highly recommended are the latest Mondo releases, both of which have the craziest packaging we've ever seen. First up is the Dust Brothers' **Fight Club** score, whose soap-coloured double vinyl LPs come in an Ikea-inspired package you have to tear open in order to listen to. It's the sort of thing which we're certain will lead to a lot of double-purchases. Second is the complete Jerry Goldsmith score to **Gremlins**. What better for Christmas than a double vinyl LP which has a UV-sensitive cover that reveals hidden artwork in the sun and water-sensitive inner sleeve that responds to the rub of a damp rag? It's absolute madness, and we couldn't be more excited to see how it all works out.

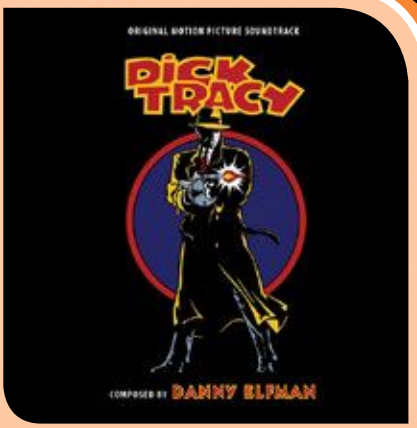
For anyone who's recently ordered from Terror Vision, there was a bonus included with their order: a sampler cassette featuring cuts from recent releases from the label, as well as previews of upcoming titles. In addition to already teased or announced soundtracks, it appears that the Georgia-based label has on the way some really fantastic selections. At the top of the list, and probably most exciting, is Chester N. Turner's **Tales from the Quadead Zone**, which has received some extra attention lately, especially since the Poisoned Mind release of **Black Devil Doll** a while back, but given that this is the absolute apex of straight-to-VHS horror, we can't wait to see the love Ryan and the rest of the folks at the label give it.

Running down the rest of the list brings the possibilities of '80s B-movies like Sonia Rutstein's score for **Igor and the Lunatics**, **Creepozoids** by Guy Moon, and Gus Russo's **Brain Damage**, as well as Claude Foisey's rather more modern **Pontypool**. We're already saving our pennies.

In further mail insert news, Ship to Shore Phonograph Co. announced that they've the scores to a couple of very interesting things in the works via the latest postcard packaged with recent







orders from the label. Firstly, and most concretely, is the score to the '90s Konami cyberpunk adventure game **Snatcher**. It's coming out as a gatefold LP with two double-sided inserts. Also on the way from the New York label is Jay Chattaway's **Maniac Cop** score. Given the rabid reaction to **Maniac Cop 2** when it was released by Mondo and Death Waltz last year, this should be a popular one.

Varèse Sarabande continue their slow return to vinyl releases with a thirtieth anniversary reissue of their version of Howard Shore's score for **The Fly**. It's limited to 2000 copies on 'teleporter fog green' vinyl, with a lenticular cover depicting Brundle's early transition to the Fly. Man, counting the Mondo releases of **Naked Lunch**, **Dead Ringers**, and **Crash**, this has to be the year of Shore.

John Scott's score for the 1976 Norman J. Warren Brit cult horror film, **Satan's Slave**, was released on Moscovitch Music for the first time ever last month. Remastered from the original master tapes by Sean Boogie, the score's out now on vinyl and compact disc. Our own Martin Unsworth described it as "*a stunning piece of work, melding some erratic styles perfectly and creating a genuine atmosphere of dread with each listen.*"

Intrada's released a glorious double compact disc of Danny Elfman's score to the 1990 action film, **Dick Tracy**. Elfman's score mirrors the gloriously Technicolor comic book adaptation of the long-running newspaper strip. The original compact disc release only had 35 minutes of music, but this two-disc set features both that original album, then all the cues in sequential order as presented in the film itself. They've all been given new stereo mixes from Disney's 32-track digital session masters, in addition to alternate takes.

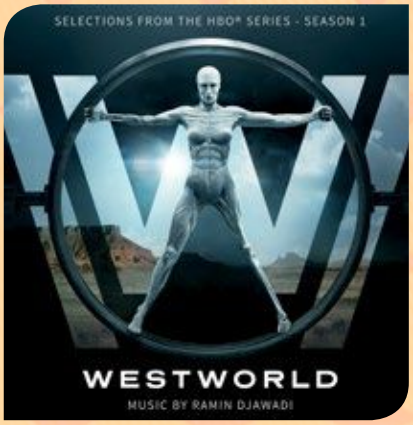
Speaking of compact disc reissues of classic scores, La-La Land bring not one, but two Harold Faltermeyer scores out for the first time. Both the original **Beverly Hills Cop** and its sequel **Beverly Hills Cop II** make their début in any format, complete with bonus tracks and in-depth liner notes. These scores are the apex of '80s music, and the limited edition of 3000 for each are likely to go quite quickly. Both soundtracks also include the big hits from each, meaning you not only get to blast *Axel F* loud as hell, but can cruise along while glorying to Glenn Frey's *The Heat Is On* and *Shakedown* by Bob Seger, along with tracks from Patti LaBelle, George Michael, and the Pointer Sisters.

The only thing the label could do that brings more joy to the hearts of soundtrack fans would be more music from **Star Trek**, and for the fiftieth anniversary of the franchise, they've got a glorious four-disc set. **Musical Rarities from Across the Star Trek Universe** is a four-disc set that has music from the original series, the début release of music from the animated series, and **The Next Generation**. There's **The Wrath of Khan** end titles without the narration, Dennis McCarthy's music for the **Star Trek: Borg** computer game, and demos from **Deep Space Nine** and **Voyager**'s titles. It's again limited to 3000 copies, and is the absolute capper on a year of amazing anniversary material.

San Francisco game developers Campo Santo have released to vinyl the score for their game **Firewatch**, as composed by the company's Chris Remo. It's quietly lovely, and features a mix of acoustic guitar and organ; even if you've not played the game, it's perfectly suited for winter nights next to the fireplace. It's available on 160-gram LP in an extra-thick, casewrapped jacket, which comes with a download code, and is also available digitally on Bandcamp.

Brave Wave came hard out the gate with the first release in their **Generations** series, a massive triple compact disc and quadruple vinyl LP of Capcom's **Street Fighter II** score. Now comes the news of their next release, and it's arguably just as epic: **Ninja Gaiden: The Definitive Soundtrack** - Volumes 1 and 2. Both volumes will be released on vinyl and compact disc, as well as digitally. The first will feature the music of both the NES and arcade versions, while the second contains the soundtracks of **Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos** and **Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom**.

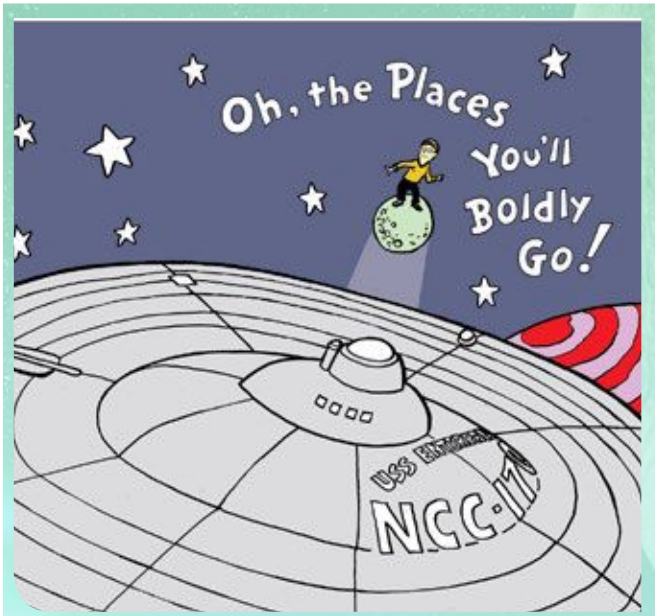
More video game music was announced just as we were wrapping up this month's issue. On the way from Data Discs are two very wonderful scores. First up is the inaugural vinyl release for Yoshitaka Azuma's score to the SEGA game **Panzer Dragoon**. It's a double vinyl LP cut at 45rpm in three different versions: a limited edition frosted clear, sky blue and grey vinyl available exclusively from the Data Discs site, and on sky blue vinyl, as well as basic black, all on 180-gram wax. Additionally, and providing an excellent follow-up to the label's release of Shinobi III earlier this year, comes Yuzo Koshiro's **Revenge of the Shinobi**, from 1989. With liner notes from the composer, the LP comes in another website exclusive colourway: bone and black vinyl. The release will also be available on bone, plus black. Pre-sales are going on now.





BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS YOU THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE



Dr Seuss Sues Mr Spock

The estate of Doctor Seuss is suing an indie comics company over their **Star Trek**/Dr Seuss mash-up **Oh The Places You'll Boldly Go**. The book, created by **Batman** artist Ty Templeton, *The Trouble with Tribbles* writer David Gerrold and comics publisher Glenn Hauman, was crowdfunded via the online service Kickstarter. The creators claim that the book is a parody. The complaint seeks up to $150,000 in damages for 'each separate Dr Seuss Copyrighted Work' that was infringed, in addition to any profit.

Janet Ellis Up for Bad Sex Prize

Former **Blue Peter** presenter and **Doctor Who** actress Janet Ellis is up for the notorious Bad Sex in Fiction Award. The sticky-backed plastic wrangler joins fellow authors Gayle Forman, Tom Connolly, and Erri de Luc in her nomination. Ellis is eligible for the prize thanks to some risible writing in her début novel, **The Butcher's Hook**. The award is administered by The Literary Review to highlight poorly thought out sex scenes in novels and to give us all a good chuckle.

Jaine Fenn is Picocon Guest of Honour

Perhaps the UK's smallest science fiction literature convention, Picocon is all set for 2017. Picocon 34 will feature Hidden Empire author Jaine Fenn as its Guest of Honour. Other guests include **Crashing Heaven** writer Al Robertson, the Clarke Award-winning Paul McAuley, and Justina Robson. The event will be held Saturday February 18th, 2017 at Imperial College Union in London.

European Science Fiction Society Awards Announced

Congratulations to all the winners of the European Science Fiction Society Awards, which were announced at Eurocon 2016 in Barcelona. Best Author went to Tom Croshill (Latvia), Best Artist to Stephan Martinère (France), and Best Publisher was Nova – Ediciones B (Spain).

Book Smugglers Drop Sunil Patel

Highly regarded small-press publisher Book Smugglers has dropped science fiction author Sunil Patel from their schedule. They have removed his work **The Merger** from sale and have cancelled any future projects with the writer. This follows revelations about the author from other members of the science fiction community. Book Smugglers said on their website 'As members of the SFF community, as publishers, and as women, we cannot in good conscience support this author's work any longer.'

Eurocon Heads to France for 2018

2018's Eurocon location has been announced as Amiens, France. The event will be held between July 19th and 22nd, and will be called Nemo 2018. Amiens is, of course, where Jules Verne wrote much of his science fiction, and is a short drive from Paris. Confirmed guests include Aliette de Bodard, Ian Watson, Mike Resnick, and Pierre Bordage.

Kenya Barris Wins Serling Award

The Rod Serling Award for Advancing Social Justice Through Popular Media has been given to screenwriter Kenya Barris, who is best known for his work on the sitcom **Black-ish**. The award is presented in honour of writer, producer, teacher, and humanitarian Rod Serling, whose work on **The Twilight Zone** made him a household name.

Gollancz to Publish Latest WILD CARDS Book

Wild Cards, George R. R. Martin's long-running series of super hero stories, is now being published by Gollancz, the UK's oldest fantasy publishing imprint. The book is out in February and is called **High Stakes**. The anthology sees super-powered freaks (known as Jokers) and meta-human heroes (called Aces) take on some other-dimensional threat. The rights to develop **Wild Cards** for TV have been acquired by Universal Cable Productions, the team that brought you **The Magicians** and **Mr. Robot**. Co-creator of the series Melinda Snodgrass will be an executive producer.

Jack Chick 1924 - 2016

Notorious cartoonist and evangelist Jack T. Chick died in October at the age of 92. Chick was best known for his tiny comic-book pamphlets that took an extreme view of the world and preached an extreme form of Christianity. His book **Dark Dungeons**, which accused **Dungeons and Dragons** players of witchcraft, has been the target of mockery and parody for decades. He is survived by his wife, Susie.

POTTERMORE Continues to Grow

The official world of the Harry Potter website, **Pottermore**, has continued to grow and grow, the digital content company reports. This follows a decision to make its eBooks and audiobooks available via all the usual online retailers. In the year to end-March 2016, sales have grown from last year's £7m to just over £15m. Neither **Harry Potter and The Cursed Child** nor **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them** had been released at that point, so it'll be interesting to see exactly how much the brand has sky rocketed since then.

Catch STARBURST's own book podcast, Brave New Words, via our website starburstmagazine.com and on twitter @radiobookworm.

ED FORTUNE HIGHLIGHTS NOTEWORTHY NEW TITLES

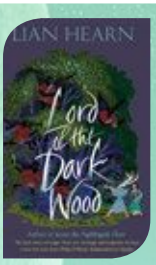
COMING SOON



STAR WARS - AFTERMATH: EMPIRE'S END

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG
PUBLISHER: CENTURY
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 23RD

The enormously popular **Star Wars Aftermath** series has drawn a lot of criticism so far. Mostly from the sort of fan who demands that nothing changes. This final instalment will feature scenes from The Battle of Jakku, the last stand of the Galactic Empire and final large-scale battle of the Galactic Civil War, which happened one year after **Return of the Jedi**. The battle was fought between the New Republic and the depleted forces of the Imperial Military, and with the stakes so high, it's guaranteed compulsive reading for all **Star Wars** fans.



LORD OF THE DARKWOOD

AUTHOR: LIAN HEARN
PUBLISHER: PICADOR
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 26TH

Lian Hearn (aka sci-fi author Gillian Rubinstein) is back with yet another pseudo-feudal Japan fantasy adventure. The rightful Emperor has gone missing. Few know that he has become an outlaw of the Darkwood. Even fewer realise that he has become cured. Alas, without the true ruler on the Lotus Throne, drought and famine choke the realm. Can Shikanoko overcome the curse that has changed his body and heal the land? Will anyone be able to help him do so? We're looking forward to finding out.



THE NINTH RAIN

AUTHOR: JEN WILLIAMS
PUBLISHER: HEADLINE
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 23RD

STARBURST completely adored Jen Williams' previous work **The Copper Cat Trilogy**. So it's with some anticipation that we look forward to her next fantasy series, which starts with **The Ninth Rain**. The new series sees a team of adventurers, all with different motivations, team up to explore the lost city of Ebora and retrieve ancient and forgotten artifacts. Can an eccentric lady adventurer, a down on his luck warrior and a renegade witch succeed where others failed? Or will they get tangled in a conspiracy of magic and war?



INFERNAL PARADE

AUTHOR: CLIVE BARKER
PUBLISHER: SUBTERRANEAN PRESS
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 28TH

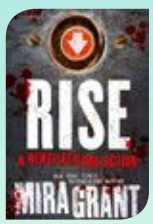
Clive Barker is still one of the biggest names in horror to this day, with his work famed for its fantastic content and incredible worlds. The new, limited edition novella **Infernal Parade** is quintessential Barker. It is a tightly focused and intense tale of a convicted criminal, Tom Requiem. When he returns from the brink of death, it restores both fear and a touch of awe to a complacent world. Featuring golems, vengeful humans both living and dead, and assorted impossible creatures. A thrill for fans.



GRIM DEATH AND BILL THE ELECTROCUTED CRIMINAL

AUTHORS: MIKE MIGNOLA, TOM SNIEGOSKI
PUBLISHER: ST MARTIN'S PRESS
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 28TH

Hellboy creator Mike Mignola brings us yet another impossible tale that also happens to be fantastic fun. This illustrated, 1930s-style pulp tale follows the adventures of the twin handgun-toting Grim Death and his unfortunate companion, a wronged ex-con clad in the striped costume of a convict. As crime threatens to overwhelm the city and no one seems to be able to stop it, it's up to these pulp action freaks to act and save mankind from itself. Expect two-fisted fury and noir cliché. Will it be justice, or just us? Read it and find out.



RISE: A NEWSFLESH COLLECTION

AUTHOR: MIRA GRANT
PUBLISHER: ORBIT
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 31ST

This one is a stonker, and now coming in paperback. This huge anthology collects every story so far from Mira Grant's zombie-chic **Newsflesh** series. America has cured the common cold, cured cancer and pretty much cured death. Unfortunately, that means the Earth is now overrun with the infected; flesh-hungry ghouls walk the USA and only the very brave or the very foolish venture outside of their fortress homes. This collection includes two brand new novellas, so is a must for fans of walking corpses.



GOTHAM: DAWN OF DARKNESS

AUTHOR: JASON STARR
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 31ST

Sometimes, following the iterations of a franchise can be hard work. **Gotham: Dawn of Darkness** is the book based on the TV series based on the comic. Better yet, it's a prequel to the first episode of the popular Batman-inspired TV show, a series that is in itself a prequel. It follows the events leading up to the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents, and along the way introduces us all to Gotham's crime families and associates including Hugo Strange, Fish Mooney, Carmine Falcone, Sal Maroni and the freak who would be king of crime, Oswald Cobblepot.



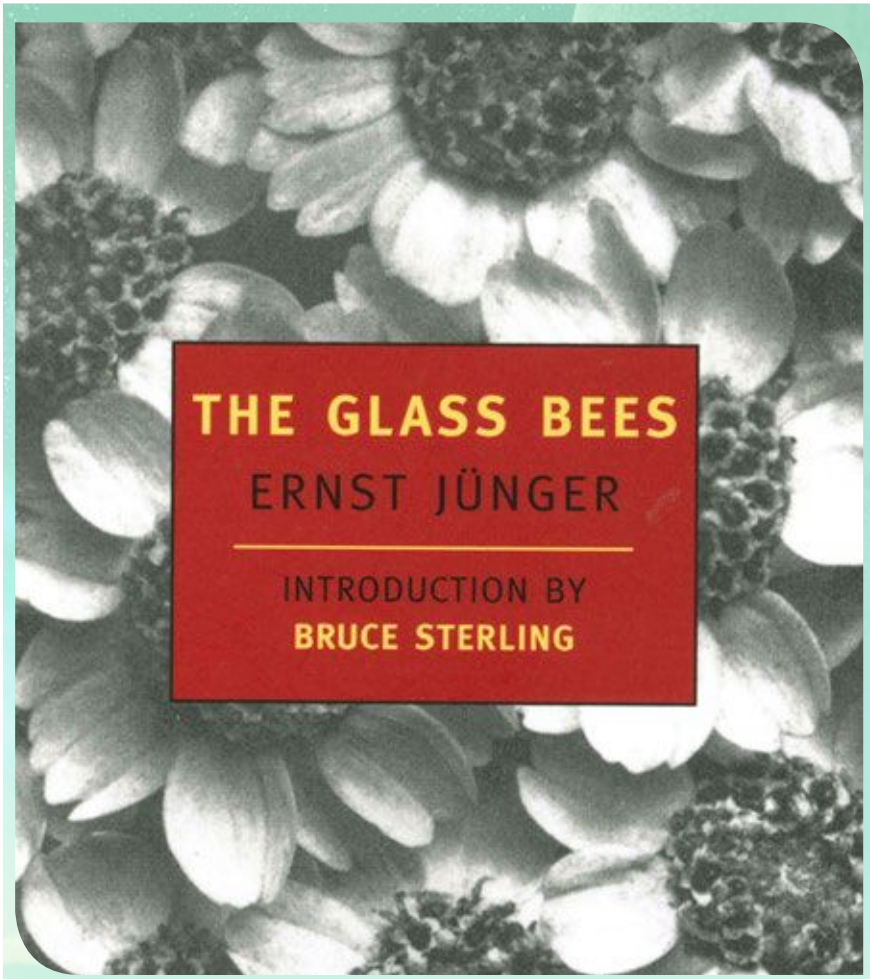
THE LEGION OF REGRETTABLE SUPERVILLAINS: ODDBALL CRIMINALS FROM COMIC BOOK HISTORY

AUTHOR: JON MORRIS
PUBLISHER: QUIRK BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 28TH

The long-awaited sequel to The League of Regrettable Superheroes. This book dives into the rich and weird world of awful ideas and deadline-crunching baddies. Includes the likes of Swarm, a vintage bad guy made out of Nazi bees (how the bees are Nazis isn't really explained). Also includes Brickbat, a brick themed super villain, for a given value of super. Many more terrible ideas can be found in this volume, none of which will ever appear in a Hollywood movie. This should be an awful lot of silly fun, and perfect talking piece.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK OF GENRE FICTION BY KATE FATHERS



In an unnamed future, veteran soldier Richard is looking for a job. An old friend gets him an interview with Giacomo Zapparoni, a wealthy and secretive creator of robotics who is looking for a chief of security. But Richard's interview is strange, and he's frequently left alone on Zapparoni's country compound to wander and observe. And what he finds looks to challenge everything that he believes.

The Glass Bees is a very strange book. It has very little plot, only two settings and a handful of characters, and the story itself is extremely slow-moving. The bulk of the page count is taken up with Richard's philosophical musings and his storytelling, as he tries to reconcile the idea of working for someone who creates robots with his wariness of technology. The overarching theme of the book is change, specifically dealing with rapid technological change, which Jünger predicted would happen sometime after World War II. Already from where he was writing in the 1950s, Jünger was experiencing the early signs of that revolution; warfare had altered substantially between the two world wars he fought in, and technology had gone from lightbulbs and the horse-and-cart of his childhood to television, cars and the first stirrings of launching a satellite into space. If *The Glass Bees* is any indication, Jünger was already trying to come to grips with that change, and he assumed it would only be a bigger struggle as time passed.

Boy, was he right.

As we know in the 21st century, there are many ways to deal with a rapidly changing world, and one of those ways is through nostalgia. That's the avenue Jünger chooses to explore, and as Richard prepares for his interview and waits again and again for Zapparoni, he starts thinking about how good things used to be, how simple life was, how much better farming in the country is than working in the fast-paced city. He also questions whether all this technology will really benefit humanity, which is still a valid question today. A big part of Richard's nostalgia is his yearning for his days as a soldier, and while he never idealises war he certainly idealises the military. I'm not a huge fan of military narratives, but I did find Richard's ruminations on the changing makeup of war really fascinating, especially towards the end when he starts to wonder whether small robots could be used in warfare. (Did Jünger predict drones? Possibly.) What I also liked is how Jünger uses Richard's military career to explain some of his technophobia. Richard knew where he stood in the military. He knew how it functioned. He liked the structure. As a civilian, he is floating in a sea he doesn't - and is sometimes unwilling to - understand; one that keeps getting farther and farther away from the world he grew up in. It's a testament to Jünger's talent that he makes Richard a sympathetic character, someone whose struggle is relatable and understandable. The wrong turn of phrase, too much time spent lamenting technology, could have made him too frustrating to take.

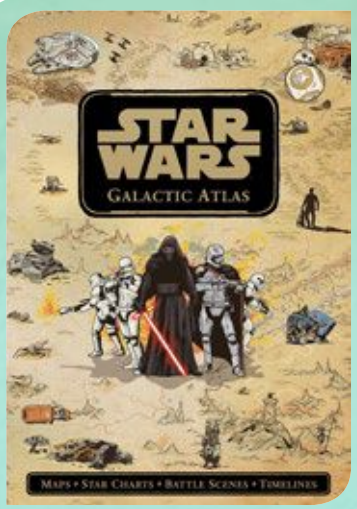
If you set Richard and his narration aside, another area *The Glass Bees* truly excels is in the technology itself. So much of what Jünger predicted in his book has actually come true, from our fascination with robotics to the changing way we produce food. He even predicted where we are economically: that processed foods are cheap, and only privilege allows you to eat whole, healthy food regularly. It's fascinating to sit down and read sci-fi that doesn't feel like sci-fi, although I do think the story could have been streamlined. Richard has a tendency to ramble. There are pockets of purple prose. The translation, however, is one of the best I've ever read.

At the end of the day, *The Glass Bees* is an incredibly valuable book. It was not appreciated in its time, but for modern readers, it is thought-provoking and very relevant. Jünger uses sci-fi in one of the best ways: as a tool to explore ideas, both of our future and our own humanity. Fiction works best when it is unafraid to ask questions, to challenge everything we are, and everything we could be. This is fiction at its best. I encourage everyone to read it.

Jünger spent his 102 years writing books on sci-fi, war, and politics. You can find English translations of much of his work.

THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



STAR WARS: GALACTIC ATLAS

AUTHOR: EMIL FORTUNE
ARTIST: TIM MCDONAGH
PUBLISHER: EGMONT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The recent cinematic revival of Star Wars has resulted in a new energy for the franchise, with a whole new generation of fans introduced to its galaxy and a dizzying array of tie-in materials to keep them hooked. This latest publication, the Galactic Atlas, aims to get them in the know regarding many of the saga's planets, moons, and battle stations.

It's a big (approximately A3-sized) hardcover volume, and is allegedly an in-universe publication; Emil Fortune's introduction is from the point of view of an alien archivist who has uncovered an artist's maps depicting major galactic locations. These maps are not strictly geographically accurate, rather they aim to capture the 'feel' of these worlds, and so include depictions of many of the events that took place there.

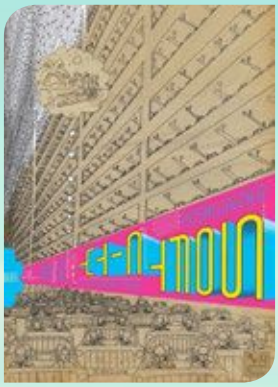
The maps are illustrated by Tim McDonagh, and he's done a sterling job of it. Each planet is given a double-page spread, and is captured in colourful and absorbing detail, allowing you to lose much more time than planned poring over them. McDonagh is particularly skilled at capturing the weird and wonderful wildlife of this galaxy in his precise but cartoonish style, really bringing each unique planet to life.

Planets covered include those from all seven existing films, plus some locations from the Clone Wars and Rebels television series, with events and characters from other Star Wars canon sources – including the Shattered Empire comics and Lost Stars novel – sometimes brought in. Excitingly, there's also a spread dedicated to the desert moon of Jedha, a spiritual home of the Jedi, which will make its début in the upcoming Rogue One; the book is careful not to give too much away, of course, but you can gleam some hints about the places we'll visit and the characters we'll meet come the first spin-off film's release.

Despite this wide-ranging material, don't go expecting a serious, info-heavy reference book like the ones popular in the pre-Disney EU; this is largely aimed at younger readers or those new to the Star Wars galaxy, but the charming illustrations and high production quality will nonetheless keep the parents and hardened fans hooked, too. The perfect treat for aspiring Skywalkers!

KIERON MOORE

8



SOFT CITY

AUTHOR: HARITON PUSHWAGNER, CHRIS WARE
PUBLISHER: THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, INC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The baby wakes to a new sunrise. The parents take their 'life' pills and begin the day. Father, looking absolutely identical to the rest of the Soft City workforce, leaves the apartment at the exact same moment as everybody else, drives to work in the exact same car as everybody else, and sits at his desk surrounded by seemingly thousands of his own clones. "We are secure... you have to be secure. If you're fired, you are finished," is the Soft City mantra. The Boss of Soft City arrives and surveys his kingdom, watching tanks roll off the assembly lines and his factories pump neurotoxins into the air. Oblivious to everything, the mothers and babies of Soft City go shopping. At the end of the day, like lookalike and behave-alike drones, the men return home, the babies are put to bed; the parents eat dinner, watch TV and take their 'sleep' pill. The baby watches the moon rise above the rooftops of Soft City.

And that's exactly what happens in Hariton Pushwagner's curious graphic novel, which was originally drawn between 1969 and 1975 and then, for decades, disappeared without a trace. But it's not the story (or anti-story) behind Soft City that makes this book so fascinating. Pushwagner's artwork is childlike but also strangely hypnotic. Watching the inhabitants of Soft City rise mechanically from their beds, travel to work with wide unblinking eyes, sit down zombie-like behind their desks and then return home again after mindlessly following the Boss's instructions and, no doubt, having unconsciously hastened their own destruction, has a weirdly brainwashing effect on the reader. We don't participate in the book, we simply let it wash over us. And, while it washes over us, the occasional errant thought bubble that drifts across the page – a Soft City drone dreams of the beach while another drone imagines himself as a fighter pilot, no doubt wishing he could blow all his fellow drones out of the sky – is strangely disaffecting. Even a random blink-and-you'll-miss-it act of violence on the motorway tucked away in a corner doesn't jar us as much as it should. And is it any coincidence that the Boss, so completely removed from his hordes of identically somnambulistic employees, receives sinister messages from an invisible controller wherein English and German are combined and a ticker-tape with the skull and crossbones on it orders him to 'Sieg Spray!'? "Where is the mind when the body is here?" wonders another drone, in a window high above the street, and that seems to be the question Pushwagner wants us to consider, while simultaneously reinforcing the suggestion that the distance between the reader and the inhabitants of Soft City is not so distant after all. It's almost as if he is trying to implicate us in his character's complacency.

Soft City is a mind-trip and should come with the warning that once you start thinking about what it means, the more complicated and troubling it becomes. For that reason, it's also a work of genius.

IAN WHITE

8



CLASS: THE STONE HOUSE

AUTHOR: A K BENEDICT
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the launch of Class, the BBC has also commissioned a set of books based on the series. AK Benedict's The Stone House shows all the hallmarks of this – the setting is moved out of the school for simplicity, most of the central characters are a bit one-dimensional and there is nothing she can do to play with the format. At the time of writing, she can't have known how the show would be realised on release, so in most respects (this is a brand new series) she plays safe and focuses on a haunted house mystery.

Criticisms aside, the haunted house manages to be creepy and interesting, and like the show itself we get some horrific effects-laden sequences when all the students visit. Once the action gets past using all of the main characters to focus on Tanya and Miss Quill, it becomes better paced and far more entertaining. The story makes some more sense as the intricacies of the set-up are revealed, and while some of it seems like convenient tidying away of various threads, some of it gives hints of a better story hidden underneath this solid if safe venture into the YA world of Coal Hill Academy.

Where AK Benedict's strengths as a writer (she normally writes spooky crime fantasies or Torchwood audios for Big Finish) come to the fore is in the resolution. Yes, there's a tie-back to Coal Hill School (slightly), but there is an intelligently written backstory and some good new characters that tangentially give us far more insight into Miss Quill. Hopefully, we will get more from AK Benedict and it will be better informed by the episodes so far, in which case she has shown plenty of potential.

It's not a perfect book by any means, nor is it essential reading for fans of Class. What it is, is a decent enough piece of entertainment and an introduction to a writer who many may not previously have encountered.

TONY JONES

7



BATMAN: A CELEBRATION OF THE CLASSIC TV SERIES

AUTHOR: BOB GARCIA, JOE DESRIS
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the way the Caped Crusader has been serviced as of late, a certain element of fandom has returned to the gloriously camp version of the sixties. We've already seen the full Adam West/Burt Ward series released in high definition, the pair returned - albeit in voice only - for the animated Return of the Caped Crusaders, and now we have a beautiful coffee table book that looks into all aspects of the series.

The introduction by West is a passionate read, as he reminisces about the show and sounds genuinely thankful for the fans who have stuck with his version of Batman for so long. He also is openly mournful at the loss of so many of his show co-stars. It's certainly hard not to read his words without imagining the caricatured Adam West voice.

Set into easy to read but informative chapters, A Celebration covers the series from development, writing, casting and even the ingenious misappropriation of various pieces of used sets from the Fox backlot (mainly coming from Irwin Allen productions) to dress the screen test footage. While the text may be sparse in some chapters, the images more than make up for it. There are hundreds of stills and delightful behind-the-scenes photographs that will have fans grinning wider than the Joker. They are accompanied by numerous elements of ephemera from the production, which includes production paintings, sketches and studio notes and letters.

A whole chapter is set aside to list the many instances that Robin exclaimed something as 'Holy... Batman'. These are worth perusing for the gems one might have otherwise forgotten, such as 'Holy cliché!', 'Holy contributing to the delinquency of minors!', and 'Holy unrefillable prescriptions!' These moments were an element of the show that always had viewers smiling and certainly a welcome addition to the book.

The mammoth tome - it's an oversized affair that comes in at over 250 knee-aching pages - is completed by an episode guide, which while not essential, is a great way to piece together all the info you've just ploughed through. There's even a (paper) utility belt that wraps around the hardback cover, although the temptation is to remove this to stop it being damaged - well, you know what us collectors are like!

The book does what it sets out to do with ease - it's a celebration of the camp series that is still the definitive representation of Batman for many of us. Hardcore fans will probably not learn too much new from the text, but will devour the images and love the passion that has brought everything together. Retreat to your own personal Bat-cave with a copy and rediscover the series all over again.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

8



HBO'S GAME OF THRONES COLOURING BOOK

PUBLISHER: CHRONICLE BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In some far-off fantasy land, fans of A Game of Thrones are eagerly expecting the latest instalment of George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire to turn up in their stocking this Christmas. Unfortunately, in this world the book still isn't finished yet, so those excitable fans will have to make do with what is available. Given recent trends in publishing, that stocking filler is, of course, HBO's Game of Thrones Colouring Book.

This artefact of fandom is inspired directly by the TV show, and as such, all of the black and white illustrations for you to colour in are instantly recognisable as characters and things from the show. This, unfortunately, makes the whole affair a little bland, as they've gone for stuff that works and is obvious.

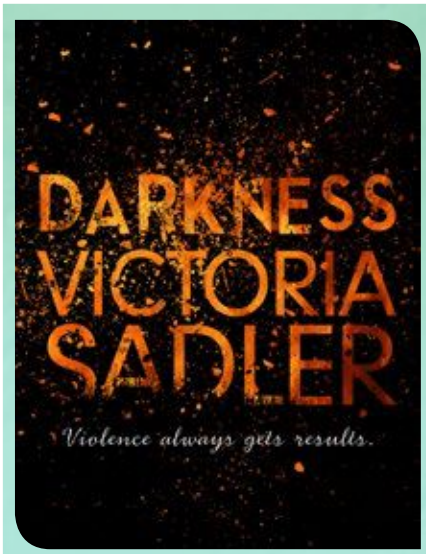
This is a bit of a pity; anyone who's seen the work of storyboard artist William Simpson knows that much of the art for the TV series is gorgeous stuff. Fans of the series will be familiar with how the Iron Throne should look (and able to contrast the book version from the HBO version) or what all the heraldry looks like; this has none of this subtlety. Some of the pages may as well be tracings of TV stills.

Worse still, this is a colouring book rather than a mindfulness book. The difference is key; mindfulness colouring books are complicated in places, allowing the user to enjoy the activity book as a meditation. Complicated patterns designed for colouring in are a great tool for relaxation. Alas, none of that is here. This is a book that can be done with crayons.

The heart and soul of the show's powerful images have been stripped bare to create what is essentially basic and disposable. It's hard to work out exactly whom this book is for; there are better colouring books out there and plenty of them have fantasy themes. There are better art books of the show and there are certainly more atmospheric and immersive books inspired by George R. R. Martin's world for you to enjoy. Still, as a stocking filler, it does the job; just don't expect any of the prettier, gorier or even interesting bits of the series to be in this one.

ED FORTUNE

5



DARKNESS

AUTHOR: VICTORIA SADLER
PUBLISHER: NO PLAIN JANE LIMITED
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The world is shattered. Widespread social unrest, disease, pollution and economic collapse have transformed our cities into battlefields. In Britain, the war rages between two equally brutal opponents; there is the patriarchal State, ruthlessly focused on regaining control of the country and maintaining the male-dominated status quo; and then there is RAZR, a paramilitary group consisting solely of women, who are determined to destroy the State and begin the process of rebuilding a better future.

After her father dies, Laura risks a dangerous journey through the heart of London and is only narrowly rescued by State soldiers, who process her and send her with eleven other women to a safe haven called an enclave. But RAZR attack the convoy and tell Laura and her companions the sinister truth: the enclaves are not safety. They are rape centres organised by the State in a desperate attempt to replenish the rapidly falling population. So Laura chooses to fight with RAZR, even though she isn't entirely sure their charismatic leader Jane can be trusted. But, as allegiances are formed and betrayed and the violence between RAZR and the State escalates into new heights of viciousness, Laura begins to question exactly what she is fighting for, and who is the real enemy.

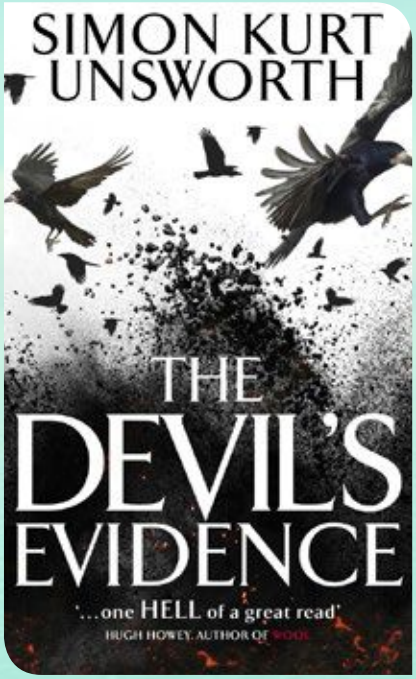
Darkness is an interesting novel. It moves quickly and has a strong central character. Like all good dystopian fiction, it's also extremely relevant and chillingly credible, borrowing from real world headlines to suggest that Darkness isn't exploring some hypothetical distant future event, but a global catastrophe that could arrive sooner than we think if we don't start repairing the damage now. The opening chapters are especially striking – Victoria Sadler is a very good writer with a convincingly apocalyptic vision and her evocation of a ruined London is particularly excellent. It's also refreshing to read a grown-up piece of dystopian fiction that doesn't have an angsty teenager at its core.

But there is a moment towards the last third of Darkness which threatens to unbalance everything. It's a scene when RAZR's leader launches into a rant that tips the novel out of the realms of fiction and into a ferocious anti-male diatribe. Don't get us wrong, the central theme of Darkness - how women have been forced to militarise themselves in order to eliminate the patriarchy which, for centuries, has reduced their gender and their reproductive organs to commodities and that (as the back cover states) "Any man who takes control of a woman's rights at any stage of her life is a terrorist" – is as pertinent, and arguably even more important, than ever, and deserves to be properly explored. But, unlike Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale – which deals with similar themes in a very different way – it's all uncomfortably black-and-white here, there's no genuine opportunity for debate, and that narrative inequality coupled with the absence of any 'equalising' male voice weakens Darkness' power. Having recently interviewed the author, we have a better understanding of why she wrote that scene (and the scenes that come after), but it's still one of the few issues this particular writer has with the book.

Still, despite its shortcomings, Darkness unnerved us, sometimes pissed us off, forced us to examine our own opinions, and kept us reading. With a few changes and a little more heat in the action sequences (which are kinetic and gutsy but don't quite get the pulse racing as you read them), it could really have stood out from the crowd. But Darkness has the courage of its author's convictions and genuine passion behind its words, which makes us keen to find out what Victoria Sadler is going to write next.

IAN WHITE

8



THE DEVIL'S EVIDENCE

AUTHOR: SIMON KURT UNSWORTH
PUBLISHER: DEL REY
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Do you love Jim Butcher's Dresden Files series? How about the Rivers of London series by Ben Aaronovitch? Like a bit of John Le Carre intrigue? If so, you will LOVE The Devil's Evidence.

A hybrid between horror fantasy and crime procedural, Simon Kurt Unsworth's novel had this writer hooked from its first opening, fiery lines.

If you thought the afterlife was a time to set work aside, then you'd be wrong.

We once again join Thomas Fool – now head of the Devil's Information Men (a very literally damned detective unit). This time he has a new mystery to solve – arson in Hell. Fool has been thanked for his hard work in Unsworth's first novel of the series – The Devil's Detective – with new enemies. The shady Mr Tap from a new and rather more traditionally demonic department in Hell - the Evidence - has Fool in his crosshairs.

The novel twists and turns as Fool joins a delegation from Hell to Heaven while trying to solve the series of arson attacks plaguing the world below. Oh, and there's a dead body to deal with. As the pages turn, you and Fool discover there are alarming parallels between the celestial and the Satanic - especially when it comes to red tape!

Fool is fascinating as he discovers more about himself – he doesn't remember the sins which damned him – while investigating the universe around him. It's an unusual soul who strives to do the right thing despite being stuck in the worst place ever.

It's hard for a series to feel fresh and original, but Unsworth does it well. He manages to use demonology and concepts of Heaven and Hell in an innovative way, combining it with the familiar twists and turns we expect from detective fiction. Well-paced and witty, it's a good read. There are a few 'oh my god' (or should we say Devil?!) moments which give the novel a fast pace. There's also a heavy helping of political intrigue, backstabbing, and murder. He uses gothic imagery with a modern writing style to conjure up a world you can be transported into with ease.

Unsworth has built a very horrible yet believable universe with characters who you can hate as well as root for. While you don't need to read the first novel to enjoy the second in the series, we really do recommend you start at the beginning. There's a lot to take in and a great deal of character development to enjoy. A real page-turner.

JAYNE LUTWYCHE

10

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

GARETH EVANS PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



Back in August, it was announced that *Civil War II* was getting extended by an extra issue and as such, it has yet to be concluded. This is ever so slightly awkward because the post-event comic book series that usually pop up after an event like *Civil War II* have already started coming out. Case in point: this month saw the release of the new Iron Man series, complete with Tony Stark's successor, before *Civil War II* has finished showing us why there was suddenly a vacancy for a new Iron Man to begin with. I don't know if this was just poor scheduling on Marvel's part, and I enjoyed *Invincible Iron Man* #1 as first issues go, but this does feel like Marvel is jumping the gun somewhat.

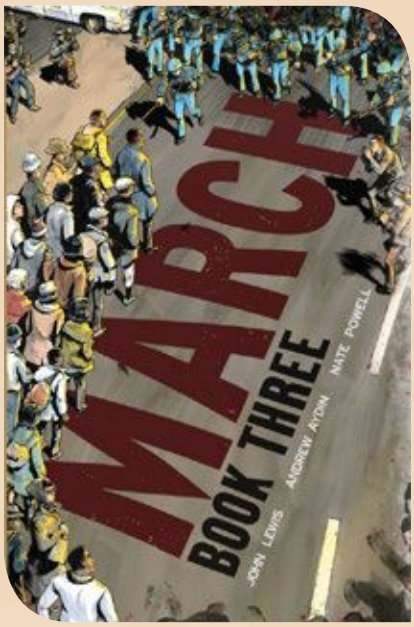
This month also saw the long-teased death of Cyclops and as superhero deaths go, it managed to do something that felt new. The caretakers of the **Watchtower** are never ones to shy away from spoilers, so I should warn you that spoilers for the last issue of *Death of X* are coming up in the next two paragraphs.

At the end of the issue, following a confrontation between the X-Men and the Inhumans, Scott Summers chooses to be killed by Black Bolt rather than surrender quietly. However, there is a twist (and for once it is a good one). After the battle, Havok (Scott's brother) and Emma Frost are discussing his death when Emma reveals that Scott had in fact died much earlier than anyone had thought. The Scott Summers who we have been following for the vast majority of this miniseries has been a psychic illusion, created and maintained by Emma. In this way, she hoped to keep him alive as an idea. Much like the famous *Sixth Sense* twist, this reveal works by having us re-evaluate the series up to that point without creating too many glaring questions. It also brings up a great point about the X-Men: their legacy.

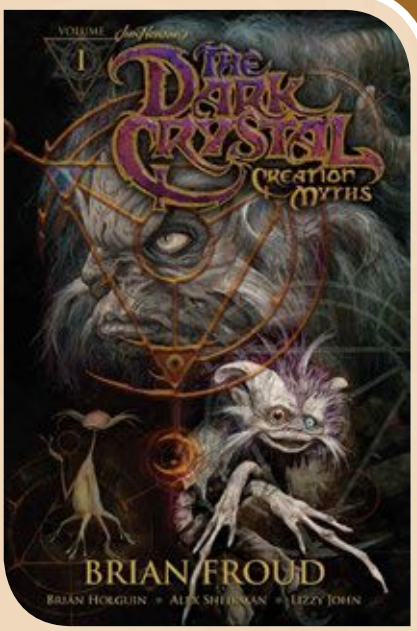
As Emma's version notes, Scott Summers has been so many things over the years that by the time of his death, it was hard to pin down what he was to himself and others. Having his 'last moments' be the creation of someone who knew him well rather than a generic fight feels like a fitting end to his character evolution over the last few years. Plus the way they handled his death makes it incredibly easy for him to be written back to life in a future story. If you have seen the second and third *Star Trek* movies (the originals, not the reboot), you should know what I'm getting at.

You may be hoping that now the dust has cleared on this latest hero vs. hero brawl, Marvel will be taking a break from them for a while. This isn't to be, however, and by the time you are reading this column, Disney vs. Fox - sorry I mean *Inhumans vs. X-men* - will be underway.

In more positive Marvel news, Spider-Man and Deadpool have become parents. Well, technically someone has combined their DNA, but the mental image from saying they have become parents is much more fun. Her name



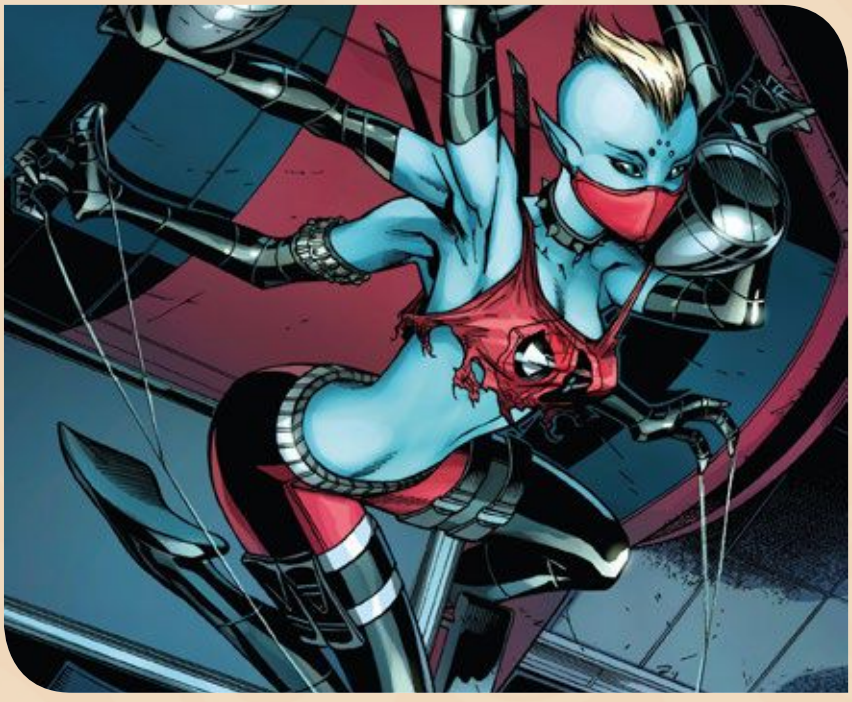




is Itsy Bitsy and I can't wait to see how writers make use of the character. Cosplayers, you know what to do.

And I will wrap up the Marvel section of this month's column with the news that *Star Wars* character Darth Maul is getting a miniseries. Darth Maul has received a lot of attention in supplemental *Star Wars* material since his appearance in *The Phantom Menace* and I think that is due to how he was used in that movie. He was seen sparingly and very little was revealed about him. When you combine that with his striking character design, it is no wonder that writers continue to depict him.

Over the many decades that comic books have existed as a medium, they have received something of a mixed response by mainstream culture. Thanks in no small part to the moral panic that arose in response to the medium in the '50s, it wasn't until relatively recently that it really started to be respected as an art form. With that context in mind, it feels good to report that a graphic novel has won a National Book Award for the first time in the award's eighty-year history. *March: Book Three* (the graphic novel that won the award) is part of a trilogy about the U.S. Civil rights movement from the perspective of writer Rep. John Lewis. This is a very personal history for Lewis as he was on the front lines of the struggle for civil rights in America. Among other things, Rep. John Lewis served as a chairman of the SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) from '63 - '66, and was one of the 'Big Six' civil rights activists of the period. I encourage our readers unfamiliar with this part of American history to look into it for themselves, maybe by picking up a copy of the book. On behalf of STARBURST, I would like to congratulate Rep. John Lewis on this award, and I hope that we see more deserving graphic novels recognised like this in the future.



Now readers of our magazine who also browse our website (something that I recommend you do) may already be aware of this, but Jim Henson movie *The Dark Crystal* is getting a sequel in comic book form. BOOM! studios will be publishing the sequel through its Archaia imprint and the first issue is currently expected to reach stores in February 2017. The sequel is set decades after the original movie; I enjoy it when a sequel to an older story takes that route - as an approach, it lends just the right amount of familiarity and mystery to a sequel.

And speaking of comic book sequels, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s 11th season started this month. It is good to see the comic going strong years later but I do wonder how long it can, and should continue. TV shows are (generally speaking) finite and I wonder if an endless run of Buffy comics would be a good thing. However long that is, let's hope that Dark Horse use the time well.

I don't have a set formula for what I will and won't cover each month so I would like to take this chance to reach out to you, the readers. If there is something you would like to see discussed more - or less - in this column, let me know. I can't make any promises over such change but the world of comic books is a big place and I always love an excuse to delve into something unfamiliar. Feel free to email me (deets below) or my overlords at **letters@starburstmagazine.com**.

Gareth Evans can be contacted at:
gareth.evans@starburstmagazine.com
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC BOOK RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



FINK ANGEL: LEGACY

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER, ALAN GRANT / ARTIST: MIKE MCMAHON, CARLOS EZQUERRA, PETER DOHERTY, TIERNEN TREVALLION / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

You just can't keep a good gang of villains down. Secondary only to Judge Death and the Dark Judges in the Dredd criminal hall of fame, few counted on the dastardly lot's popularity when they were first introduced in 2102. Despite being executed by Dredd during the legendary Judge Child Quest, the Angel Gang would be back. John Wagner and the folks at 2000 AD knew a good thing when they saw it.

First, the introduction of 'lost' Angel sibling 'Fink' – a hideously deformed poisons expert and psychopath bent on revenge for the death of his family. Second, the resurrection of the Mean Machine, the most popular Angel. Both of these events are reprinted here, in The Fink and Destiny's Angels. The former sees Fink Angel and his furry sidekick Ratty enter Mega-City One, bent on the death of Dredd and every other Judge involved in the Judge Child Quest. The latter tale teams Fink with a resurrected Mean Machine, hitting Dredd in his quaint old home life (hello Maria and Walter the Wobot!). Both are classic Dredd adventures from a period where the comic was just beginning to hit its stride, featuring typically wry and funny writing from John Wagner and Alan Grant. The Fink functions as an effective noir-ish horror tale, a game of cat and mouse (plus rat) between Dredd and The Fink, with Mike McMahon's art appropriately dark and moody – making the most of Fink's radiation-hallowed features.

Destiny's Angels is lighter in tone and more action-orientated, mining the deep stupidity of Mean Machine for laughs. Illustrated by definitive Dredd artist Carlos Ezquerra, it's perhaps the best Mean Machine story, the comic and character still in early enough days that such a trope – wronged criminal comes looking for revenge – work thoroughly well.

But John Wagner's dedication to a fluid, real-time universe means that, as Dredd ages, so do his enemies. And the lawman's lack of a no-kill rule doesn't exactly lend itself to the rogues gallery of, say, Batman or Spider-Man (hence his most prolific enemies being the indestructible Dark Judges). With the Fink dead and Mean Machine retired/also dead (?), it was time for Wagner to start raiding hitherto unseen branches of the Angel family tree. Ratfink is almost a pure horror story, The Hills Have Eyes via The Cursed Earth. Here we meet the offspring of Fink Angel – the weasly titular Ratfink. Appropriately, the art is provided by Peter Doherty (not the Libertine), the Dredd artist responsible for some of the comics' most outright disturbing stories (most notably Young Death: Boyhood of a Superfiend). Atmospheric, nasty and brooding, it's the most 'serious' Angel story ever told, establishing Ratfink as the most debased of the lot. Making Ratfink a rapist makes the story more troubling than most Dredd adventures, and the story is ultimately too reminiscent of the terrible Hills Have Eyes II (the second terrible one, not the terrible one with the dog flashbacks), but the art is among the best Doherty has ever done, and it's an intriguing look at what Judge Dredd: Exploitation Hillbilly Horror might look like.

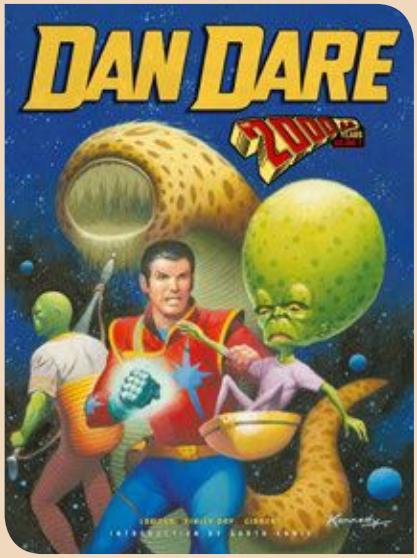
Finally, Ratfink's Revenge, in which Dredd hunts the Son of Fink in Mega-City's undercity. Written by Alan Grant and illustrated by Tiernen Travallion, it's a gory, nasty actioner which provides some of the crazier beats that Ratfink might have been missing. Travallion's art is a little cartoonish in places (particularly his Ratfink) but such wild variety between stories is why most readers turn to 2000 AD in the first place.

A fantastic collection of classics and newer thrills alike, Fink Angel: Legacy should please fans who might have exhausted the more Mean-centric stories such as The Judge Child Quest, The Three Amigos or Judgement in Gotham. It's also a cracking reminder of how diverse and exciting Judge Dredd books can be, varying wildly in tone and artistic temperament, yet always remaining cohesive and always true to the characters. Quite the legacy indeed.

JOEL HARLEY

8





DAN DARE - THE 2000 AD YEARS VOLUME 2

WRITERS: CHRIS LOWDER, GERRY FINLEY-DAY, ROY PRESTON, TOM TULLY, NICK LANDAU / ARTISTS: DAVE GIBBONS, BRIAN LEWIS, GARRY LEACH, TREVOR GORING / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This second volume of 2000 AD's Dan Dare collection picks up exactly where the first left off, but fans would be forgiven for thinking the character has undergone a dramatic change in the interim. While he was never the clean-cut hero from Eagle – this was, after all, the 1970s, when heroes with flaws were becoming more popular – the Dare that we meet now is a far cry from it. Here is a character who, confronted with a host of aliens, will always reach for his gun, some missiles, or even set a planet to self-destruct in order to achieve victory. He's not so much gritty as genocidal.

It's easy to say that in hindsight, when back then this was deemed as what boys wanted to see in a comic, and it's quite a shock at first until a change of writer sees Dare set adrift from his team and left to fend for himself. Here, he doesn't do too well and is brainwashed by arch-enemy the Mekon. Fortunately, help is eventually at hand (sorry) in the form of Eternicus the Cosmic Claw, a glove that emits laser rays capable of destroying small spacecraft.

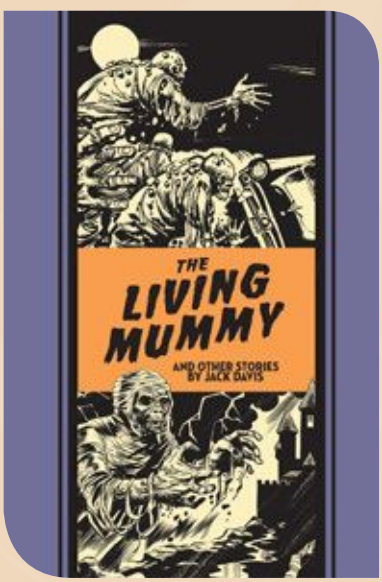
It's an oft-maligned storyline, but anyone who read these stories as a child may have fond memories of them. True, the plot hasn't particularly stood the test of time but it is relentless in pace, packed with action, and the art from Dave Gibbons is truly superb. There's a nostalgia value to it all as well, and seeing pages for the first time in decades may trigger memories the reader thought dormant and it's possible they may find themselves cheering Dare along just as they did all those years ago, hoping their hero can prove his innocence when accused of being in cahoots with the Mekon.

Alas, we'll never know the outcome, as the story was abruptly ended when 2000 AD merged with Tornado. Something had to go, and Dare's lack of popularity at the time meant he was a casualty. This volume concludes beyond that last episode, with the plans for Dare's future, which are very interesting indeed. There's not just innocence to prove; Dare was never given that chance to set himself right and return to his roots as the honorable spacefarer we all remember. For all the flaws, this is a fascinating volume of work, and the addition of faces old and new makes the reader wonder what could have been if it was allowed to continue.

ALISTER DAVISON

8





THE LIVING MUMMY AND OTHER STORIES BY JACK DAVIS

WRITER: VARIOUS / ARTIST: JACK DAVIS / PUBLISHER: FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Comic book horror has been around as long as sliced bread. It's nothing new, with titles such as The Walking Dead and Crossed breaking taboos and pushing the limits of what is accepted within the realm of artistic storytelling, it's just that the line has been pushed so far that it's difficult to see where they can go from here.

Rewind six decades or so, and you can really see what censors and parental critics felt about the minds of their children being corrupted in black and white and how they reacted in a manner so over the top that it ended up creating the Comic Code Authority in 1954 (seriously, look it up kids, it's fascinating reading!).

At the forefront of the furore stood EC Comics, who, with their line-up of fantastical titles including Tales from the Crypt and The Vault of Horror, poked the proverbial bear as often as they could with their content. Within their ranks was Jack Davis, who had a style that leaned so far away from what was expected of comics in those days nothing like the superhero stables of other comic publication companies.

He knew exactly how to draw dark stories - stories of revenge, murder, and horror. From monsters unreal to everyday and from tales of the supernatural to those based within a more mundane plane, Davis was a driving force within the industry.

Whereas it is possible to pick up collected volumes of the EC archives, this compilation of thirty-two stories is a good start as any for the uninitiated to the back catalogues of the infamous company that specifically used Davis' artwork.

Tales veer from the sublime to the ridiculous and all seemingly have a moral or two to tell. Of course, we are all too aware of these by now; with the stories being rehashed so many times over the years, it's almost impossible to count them, but this is a moment in time that we should remember fondly, even if we weren't there. Without these boundary testers, who knows if we ever would have met Rick Grimes and his gang?

Davis was a legend (he passed away in July this year) and this is a compendium that belongs in any horror fan's collection. It is beautifully put together and a great read, even all these years later. Go buy it now, lest the Crypt Keeper decides to make you one of his bookends.

J.D. GILLAM

8

ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND UP FROM THE WORLD OF ANIME AND MANGA FROM LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S DOMINIC CUTHBERT



Marvel's Stan Lee Joins Forces with Studio DEEN

In a turn of events none of us needed super-vision for, Marvel's own Stan Lee is boarding the anime train. His production company POW! Entertainment is teaming up with Studio DEEN (of **Fate/stay**, **Fruits Basket** and **Ranma ½** fame) for a superhero-themed short. Running thirty minutes, the project is titled **The Reflection** and is currently slated for a worldwide 2017 release. The story is set after a calamity where Earth was struck by strange rays of light. The mysterious beams killed many, but granted certain survivors superhuman abilities.

Hayao Miyazaki Hard at Work on New Feature Film

After 2013's **The Wind Rises** saw Ghibli's co-founder bow out from making feature-lengths, the world let out a collective mournful farewell. It was, as they say, the end of an era. But with Miyazaki's sticktoitiveness, he's recanted his retirement and started work on a brand-new feature-length. Still, this isn't the first time he's changed his mind; he did the same thing after **Princess Mononoke**. Just imagine a world without **Spirited Away**! In the coming three years, he wants to hand-draw the film from storyboards for roughly 100 cuts of footage. Miyazaki will be 78 when the film is finished in 2019. "*Perhaps I'll be alive?*" he said.

HIMOUTO! UMARU-CHAN Transforming for Chinese Live Action?

Shueisha has announced a new IP licensing deal that will let international companies adapt some of the publishers' manga properties. First in line, it seems, is a live action **Umaru-chan** for China. Yup, you read that right. The TV drama adaptation of Sankaku Head's **Weekly Young Jump** manga will air in China next year, and screenplay work is already underway. We're not sure how Umaru's persona-flipping antics will hold up in live action, but perhaps we'll get to see for ourselves somewhere down the line.

Final Rebuild of EVANGELION Film in Progress?

Evangelion 3.0+1.0, the final instalment in the series, has suffered long delays after creator Hideaki Anno grew exhausted with the franchise, for which he has repeatedly apologised to fans. But in a recent interview, Takeshi Honda, animation producer for the original series and the movie reboot, said that the fourth film is now in development. As well as thanking fans for their patience, Honda said he hoped **Evangelion** will end before he retires, as drawing so many complicated lines is getting physically difficult now he's getting on in years.

CARDCAPTOR SAKURA Anime Officially Happening!

After months of teasing and speculation, a new **Cardcaptor Sakura** anime has at last been announced. There's no word on whether it's an original or a remake, destined for a TV slot or not, but there's huge news planned before the end of the year. Sakura Kinomoto also celebrated her manga's 20th anniversary by appearing in a new series, where we re-join her as she starts her first year of junior high. CLAMP reunited for the manga that launched in **Nakayoshi** back in June, sending Sakura off on a whole new adventure. The first anime series aired back in April 1998 before finishing in March 2000.

GAINAX and Saudi Arabia's ARiNAT Tease DESERT KNIGHT

Studio GAINAX and Saudi Arabian media group ARiNAT (Arab Innovative Arts and Technologies) have recently given fans a first glimpse of their upcoming collaboration, **Desert Knight**. The movie takes place in the Arabian Peninsula and centres on an ambitious young upstart who decides to challenge the tyranny of the jungle to build a world filled with peace and love. If nothing else, it's heartening to see the **Evangelion** and **Gurren Lagann** studio active again.



A MONTHLY FOCUS ON THE COSTUMED ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT FAN CONVENTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

COSPLAY CATWALK


Credit: Cosplay Photography by Pad


Credit: Dominic Bedford



WHAT A CROC!

We meet Damian Hammond, who is part of a SUICIDE SQUAD cosplay team who do a lot of good with their hobby, as we find out…

STARBURST: How did you get started in the cosplay scene?
Damian Hammond: It was actually my wife, Cathy, who first showed me cosplay, through a CMV (Cosplay Music Video) by the YouTube phenomena Sneaky Zebra (**facebook.com/TheSneakyZebra**) and *made* me watch it.

I watched it and was instantly hooked, I watched loads of different CMVs with my son, Anton, who then begged us to take him to a comic con. So we gave in and took him to LFCC (London Film and Comic Con) in summer 2014. I didn't actually cosplay at this con but Anton (who was only nine years old at the time) did as a mini-Predator. I saw so many amazing cosplays that day that I just *had* to start cosplaying and so the next convention we went to was a gaming con called EGX Gaming Con 2014 held at Earls Court, London, where I transformed into my very first Cosplay - Vaas Montenegro from the game **FarCry 3**. As I was a massive fan of the game and I had a Mohawk and Goatee at the time, it was pretty easy to do for my first cosplay.

Since then, I have been to every major London con, have done lots of different cosplays and am now beginning to be invited as a Cosplay Guest to some conventions.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?
My favourite character has got to be the one that I'm most well-known for and that is Killer Croc from DC, including the **Batman: Arkham** games and **Suicide Squad** movie. The reason my favourite is Croc is because he is a *big* character (like me), he has an amazing deep, *loud* voice (like me) and when I first cosplayed as him at MCM London in October 2015, there was only myself and one other cosplayer in the UK who cosplayed as Croc. Since then, my name Damian and my cosplay name Devil's Garden Cosplay has been usurped by just Croc (which doesn't bother me at all!).

It makes me laugh sometimes because people will be talking about me and someone will say "*Damian who*?" And they'll go "*Oh sorry I mean Croc!*" and then the other person will know *exactly* who they mean!

You're part of an anti-bullying campaign, can you tell us more about that?
Yeah sure, I recently created a cosplay Facebook group for fans of **Suicide Squad** (comic book and movie) called Squad UK (**facebook.com/groups/1104874052895744**) and we have adopted an anti-bullying campaign called #STOMPOUTCOSPLAYBULLYING we're working alongside CSO (Cosplay Shout Outs created by Michael MJ Wayte - **facebook.com/groups/cosplayshoutouts**) who originally began the campaign after Erica Dodd aka Bella Sparkles


Credit: Bob Long Headlong Photography

(**facebook.com/bellasparklesmodel**) was disgustingly victimised, body shamed, and bullied and it unfortunately went viral, which was appalling.

Unfortunately, in any competitive hobby or community there are going to be individuals who get a kick out of making others feel bad, which is not acceptable! Therefore Squad UK and CSO together are trying to promote an anti-bullying atmosphere within the cosplay community. We want to show people that there *are* cosplay Facebook groups where you can go where you won't get 'trolled' or bullied. You can be who you want to be and *no one* will say anything nasty! #STOMPOUTCOSPLAYBULLYING

What is the best part of being part of the cosplay community?

The best part of it is the social aspect. For months, we cosplayers are working on our costumes, talking about our costumes, sending WIP (work in progress) pics of our costumes... *countless* selfies (well I do, anyway) and it all comes down to two or three days every few months at a con when we can show off our work and actually meet some of those people that we sometimes had only spoken to via Facebook. *That* is a brilliant feeling.

What plans do you have for the future?
Well a lot of my time is going to be taken up with Squad UK over the next year. We are hoping to create different 'Blocks', e.g. Squad UK North, Squad UK South etc, my dream is that we will eventually be able to have a Squad USA.

My cosplay plans are to carry on doing Croc as that is who I am and "*it's what I do*" but also I am planning on doing my dream cosplay by October 2017 - 'Old Kratos' from **God Of War 4** (which is out next year).

MARTIN UNSWORTH

*Find out more about Damian at **facebook.com/damianhammondcosplay**.*

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at *cosplay@starburstmagazine.com* and we'll print our favourites every month.

READER'S COSPLAY "ONYXEIA"



STARBURST chats to another enthusiastic costumer from the convention scene...

STARBURST: How did you get started with cosplaying?
Onyxeia: Since I was little I've been into video games and superheroes and I went to my first con (which was MCM) when I was quite young. There I saw people dressed up as some characters I knew from TV shows and since then I've been interested in cosplay. I have only been cosplaying seriously for two years, though.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?
That's a hard question as I have so much fun as all of them! I love being Zero Suit Samus and my Draenei Mage.

How long do you spend making the costumes and how much do you usually budget for?
Each costume is different depending on the level of armour, weapons etc. but I start early on so that I don't have to rush and I have time for other things. The same with budget really as making armour can be a little expensive due to materials, but I try to not spend over £300.

What costumes do you have planned for the future?
I have a couple planned for MCM May 2017. Unfortunately, one is secret at the moment but the other is Widowmaker from **Overwatch**! I will be making everything from scratch and hopefully adding lights and motors. I also have a very big list of **World of Warcraft** characters that I'd like to do!

MARTIN UNSWORTH

Find out more about Onyxeia at facebook.com/Onyxeia-1584020001883559.





NEWS AND PREVIEWS IN GAMING BY LEE PRICE

PIXEL JUICE



Massive NO MAN'S SKY Update Released

An enormous update for **No Man's Sky** has given players many of the features that they expected from the original release, potentially marking a return to the good graces of players for developers Hello Games.

Key features of the Foundation Update include the addition of a 'Survival Mode', which will make the game much more challenging and place the focus on surviving against the odds. Base building has also been added, which comes with the apparent ability to form alliances with alien races and recruit them into researching new developments in farming, agriculture and weapons. Quick travel will also be implemented between the bases players create.

Hello Games is calling this the first of many free updates for players, so let's hope the bad will surrounding the game starts to dissipate as more of these are made available.

DUKE and GEARS to Meet?

Now this is an idea we weren't expecting. Rumours are circulating that a crossover between **Gears of War** and **Duke Nukem** is being considered after a tweet from Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford, in reply to a fan who proclaimed such a crossover would be 'badass', claimed that said fan would enjoy an announcement that is to be made by the company in December.

While the hyper-masculine/misogynistic Duke may share a fair bit with the super-muscles of the **Gears of War** crew, the chances of an actual crossover are extremely unlikely if the tones of the two series are anything to go by.

In all likelihood, this tweet is foreshadowing an upcoming announcement about the **Duke Nukem** property. Perhaps the resulting game will play in the same way as **Gears of War**?

COMING SOON



NIOH

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 9TH

Team Ninja may be best known for the Dead or Alive and Ninja Gaiden series, but with Nioh, they are clearly taking some inspiration from the success of Dark Souls and the increasing demand for difficult games to satisfy the hardcore. In truth, the game probably owes more to the classic PS2 Onimusha series in terms of style, particularly in placing the player in a battle against the Oni and setting the game in medieval Japan. It also promises to carry more of an attacking slant than the Souls games, so this is one to watch out for.

COMING SOON



YOSHI'S WOOLLY WORLD

PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 3RD

With the Wii U slowly nearing the end of its run, some of the console's best properties have been finding their way to Nintendo's 3DS. Woolly World is one of them and it brings an interesting twist to the platform genre, particularly in terms of its graphical style. The wool isn't just a gimmick either, as Yoshi now produces balls of yarn from everything he swallows, each of which has different uses depending on its colour. Those who already own the original may want to give this a miss, but it's an excellent opportunity for 3DS fans to get their hands on one of the better games from the Wii U catalogue.

Ubisoft VR Games Announced as Cross Platform

The three VR games that Ubisoft will be bringing to PlayStation VR are to feature cross-platform support, which means they can be played with anybody regardless of the type of headset they are using.

The company claims that this was the intention from the start, but this can also be seen as a blow to PlayStation VR, which will no longer be able to claim **Eagle Flight**, **Werewolves Within**, and **Star Trek: Bridge Crew** as platform exclusives.

RESIDENT EVIL 7 to be a Play Anywhere Title for Xbox

Capcom has confirmed that the eagerly anticipated **Resident Evil 7** will be a Play Anywhere title for the Xbox, meaning it will feature the ability to transfer saved files from Xbox One to PC and back again, allowing for more choice in how the game is played.

This makes Capcom the first third-party developer to join the Play Anywhere initiative and it will be interesting to see if others jump on this burgeoning bandwagon or if they wait to see how the title fares first.



Three Nintendo Attractions to be Built at Universal Studios

Rumours have circulated about a possible team-up between Universal Studios and Nintendo for a while now. Finally, Nintendo have confirmed the rumour by announcing that three themed attractions are to be erected in Universal Studios locations in Japan, Orlando and Hollywood.

A press release claimed the goal is "*to bring the characters, action and adventure of Nintendo video games to life within Universal theme parks. And to do so in new and innovative ways that capture what makes them so special.*"

Of all the game companies in the world, it is only Nintendo that have the pedigree to pull something like this off successfully. Let's hope that it all works out.

COMING SOON



HALO WARS 2

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 21ST

Microsoft seems determined to milk the Halo franchise for all that it's worth, which means bringing Halo Wars back into the fold. Unlike most games in the series, Halo Wars 2 is a real-time strategy title and will see the crew of the UNSC Starship 'Spirit of Fire' facing off against a new enemy, known as the Banished. There will also be multiplayer options, with the Skirmish mode most likely to appeal to fans. It will be interesting to see how this one does, as the original Halo Wars was actually halfway decent.

COMING SOON



FOR HONOR

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 14TH

For Honor seems like something of a fantasy genre mash-up on the face of things, with players given the choice of playing as three factions – Knights, Samurais and Vikings – to engage in a lot of hack-n-slash brawling. Each character has a class, with some being hybrids to offer some of the best and worst of both worlds. It all sounds slightly generic, but the 'Art of Battle' mode, which appears to be mostly reserved for the big boss fights, should offer a twist as it places the emphasis on duelling, rather than the slicing and dicing of the rest of the game.

Ubisoft's New DLC Announcement

Ubisoft has decided to confront one of the main issues that gamers tend to have with DLC by announcing that any future DLC the company releases will be for content that is not required to get the full experience from their games.

"*You have the game, and if you want to expand it - depending on how you want to experience the game - you're free to buy it, or not*," said Vice President of Live Operations Anne Blondel-Jouin in a recent interview.

It appears that **Rainbow Six: Siege** is the major influencer here, as its model of offering all new characters as free DLC, with players being given the option of buying accessories that don't actually affect the gameplay, has proven to be pretty popular.

All in all, it's definitely positive news for the industry, particularly given how unpopular some DLC practices have proven to be in recent years.

Pokémon Go Gets Extensive Updates

Niantic has done a lot to tempt players back to **Pokémon Go** after the initial numbers saw sharp declines. Experience bonuses for first catches and Pokéstops of the day have been well-received, as has the increase in number and variety of Pokémon that spawn near players' homes.

Furthermore, some crafty coders have found that the most recent updates have added information for somewhere in the region of 100 new Pokémon for the game. While nothing official has been announced, it is likely that these will cover the majority of the Gold/Silver era.

This has all been followed with another announcement that Ditto is now part of the **Pokémon Go** roster. Interestingly, Ditto will only reveal itself after catching whatever Pokémon you thought you were catching, so the possibility of snagging a Ditto now exists with every single Pokémon you catch. While this may be great in most cases, we can't help but think that somebody is going to end up disappointed when a different super rare Pokémon turns out to be a Ditto in disguise.

Kojima to Get His Due

A lot of Hideo Kojima fans were in uproar when it was revealed that Konami was holding back an award for him that he should have received last year. The real point of contention is that this was an Industry Icon award, rather than an award specifically for Metal Gear Solid V, and it was meant to celebrate all of Kojima's contributions to the gaming industry.

Don't for a second think that this is an act of contrition on Konami's part though, as it is actually the Game Awards who will be re-presenting the award to Kojima at the upcoming 2016 Game Awards ceremony.

Konami, for their part, has yet to release any comment. Probably because they are too busy bastardising the Metal Gear franchise with a zombie game that nobody asked for.



PERSONA 5 Delayed

Anticipation for **Persona 5** has been running high ever since **Persona 4** highlighted itself as the last great game of the PS2 era. A sequel eluded the PS3 for many years, but the game was set to finally make its mark on Valentine's Day of 2017 for both the PS3 and PS4.

Unfortunately, that will no longer be happening. Increasing efforts to ensure localisation efforts are top-notch appear to be the culprit.

Thankfully, the delay isn't too bad, with the game set to come out in April instead. **Persona V** was released to critical acclaim in Japan back in September, so at least we know there is a quality product waiting for us on the other end of the delay.

SUPER MARIO RUN Details Released

Nintendo have fed us a little more information about **Super Mario Run**, which is their upcoming game for the iPhone, iPad and, we assume, other mobile platforms at some point in the future.

The game will see release on December 15th and will be free to download and play to all Apple fans. However, if you want every feature the game's free modes have to offer you will need to cough up an additional $9.99, which we assume will translate to £9.99 for UK gamers.

That doesn't seem too bad, but we suppose it really depends on what these additional features end up being.

COMING SOON



BERSERK AND THE BAND OF THE HAWK

PLATFORM: PS4, VITA, PC

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 24TH

It seems like February is the month for the hack-n-slash genre. KOEI has long been the frontrunners with this style of game, so expect the expertise they have built up from umpteen Dynasty Warriors titles to be reflected in Berserk. For those not in the know, Berserk is actually a manga series, so this is something of a tie-in. The story itself follows the start of the Golden Age arc of the manga and ends with the Hawk of the Millennium Empire arc, which may mean something to existing fans.

COMING SOON



TOUHOU GENSO WANDERER

PLATFORM: VITA, PS4

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 10TH

Roguelikes are starting to gain a little more popularity in recent years, which has led to NIS America taking the risk of bringing this quirky little title to western gamers. The graphical stylings of Touhou Genso Wanderer are reminiscent of the 16-bit era, though everything has obviously been touched up, while the battle system seems to be similar to the action-RPG stylings of games like Dragon Age, only with some pretty spectacular spells thrown into the mix. It may be a good choice for those looking for something a little different.

Wii U Production to End Soon

Nintendo has dominated a fair amount of gaming news this month, despite the fact that we still know nothing new about the Switch outside of what was shown off during the console's reveal.

The company has announced that production of the Wii U will cease soon and has stated that all units that will be sent to retailers this fiscal year, at least in North American markets, have already been shipped.

A statement read: "*We can confirm that as of today, all Wii U hardware that will be made available in the North American market for this fiscal year has already been shipped to our retail partners. We encourage anyone who wants Wii U to communicate with their preferred retail outlet to monitor availability.*"

We can't imagine that there are too many people jumping over themselves to grab the console, but there is a small chance that this announcement could lead to stock running low. We wouldn't expect too many discounts though, given the high production costs for the Wii U.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST GAMING RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



CITIES: SKYLINES – NATURAL DISASTERS

DEVELOPER: COLOSSAL ORDER / PUBLISHER: PARADOX INTERACTIVE / PLATFORMS: MICROSOFT WINDOWS, OSX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Since its release last year, Cities: Skylines has become the definitive metropolis building simulator for modern gaming. Despite a few niggling bugs, a handful of missing features and a limited number of basic modes in scenario editor, it was a definite hit. Through it, Colossal Order nailed the careful balance of complexity, direct control and scale SimCity had sadly forgotten, save for one particular aspect: the Godzilla effect. Cities could fail, fall and even crumble, but there was no definite option to simply Michael Bay the living hell out of your creation. Well, that has most definitely been rectified with this latest expansion.

Natural Disasters goes the full mile when it comes to finding new and creative ways to blow up your city. Blizzards, tornados, tsunamis, freak storms and rampant wildfires all make an appearance alongside the old favourites like giant meteorites. Each is unique in the kind of damage it can inflict, with some offering lingering negative effects while others are merely content to level hundreds of buildings and then move on. The game goes the extra mile to make it clear that these aren't simply minor inconveniences, these are titans, each with their own effects and capable of ruining your day.

The sheer scale of these attacks, both in terms of visual impact and their devastation, leaves a constant sense of danger as you progress. The fact these can strike at almost any time means players will have to advance far more cautiously. While it doesn't require players to unlearn all that they have practiced, it forces them to adapt and adjust to this game-changing element. While this could have proven infuriating, the effect manages to be satisfyingly engaging, as you're left wondering how best to progress with your designs.

It would be a poor expansion, however, if the developer simply threw in a dozen of mother nature's wrecking balls without offering the players a few new toys. While you cannot half a natural disaster, there are a variety of new buildings and units to help limit the damage. The most obvious - and generally useful - of these is the presence of helicopters, which can be granted to each of the three main emergency services. While costly, the depots help ease up the congestion on the streets and allow for more immediate responses to outlying areas of the city; a nice touch, to be sure, as it proves to be universally useful no matter what is taking place.

The more direct responses to threats come in the form of early warning systems and shelters, but each is hardly perfect. They do not completely nullify the threat and have noted limitations, with warning systems only able to detect general threats an indeterminate period of time before they emerge, and shelters can only cover so much of the city. As such, there's still a great deal of reward for skilled players who plan and prepare carefully, and those who fund the emergency rescue services. They might not be able to stop the storms, but the fact they set up prefabricated shelters and limit the death toll allows you to bounce back faster, and do more than just bulldoze away demolished buildings.

The only notable limitations here stem more from a lack of fine-tuning more than anything else. For example, the scenario editor does not retain the option to build a city from the start, instead requiring you to build a city up outside the editor, and then load in a new file - something that proves to be frustratingly time-consuming when you just want to test out a few key ideas. Furthermore, many of the statistics are hidden away in the pause menu, meaning you're often clicking back and forth to see something that should have been on the main screen. The core scenarios bundled into the game are surprisingly few, with only five on offer. Well developed and challenging as they are, you'll soon burn through them and be left wishing the developers had included a few more.

Overall however, despite a few minor interface issues, Natural Disasters is a must-buy for fans. Between After Dark, Snowfall and now this reworking of the game's core threats, Cities: Skylines has proven itself a worthy successor to SimCity. If you're after a game which is equal parts painstakingly careful creation and rampant annihilation, look no further than this one.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

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TYRANNY

DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT / PUBLISHER: PARADOX INTERACTIVE / PLATFORMS: PC, OSX, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Writers love to subvert tropes. They're the tools of their trade after all, and as much as they establish certain genres, often working against them proves far more fascinating. Today's example does exactly that, as Tyranny sticks to the old fantasy tropes of ancient past civilisations, a war between good and evil, and a tyrannical overlord, then twists them. Not only is the war long over, but the bad guys won, and you're no hero but a Fatebinder, aka the overlord's enforcer.

The idea of playing the villain is admittedly hardly original, with the famed Dungeon Keeper revelling in its cartoonish sadism, yet Obsidian has pushed to add considerable depth to the concept. The situations you find whilst serving as Sauron's personal Judge Dredd, are far from completely black and white, and the story serves as an exploration of the problems which would plague such a domineering empire.

Rather than setting up situations with "this is wrong, but you're doing it anyway" morality, Tyranny instead approaches the setting as if it is a different culture. Not an inherently wrong one, but a brutal and unforgiving place nevertheless, and ruled with an iron fist. Yet the moment you think things have gone too far, there will be enough shades of grey to hold your interest, and a few interesting twists to boot. Sometimes the oppressed masses are being mistreated for a reason, and in trying to mediate events you can only make things worse.

Naturally, upholding the law against major powers will earn you a few major enemies, but how you act around them ultimately shifts certain aspects of the world. Each has their own traditions and codes, some of which might be odd or amoral but you will earn favour by playing to them. These choices can influence multiple decisions, from how certain leaders view you to who serves as the major power of the land itself. Yet try to play favourites and you can end up making an enemy of your boss. What makes the system truly interesting isn't simply the sheer impact of these choices, however, but the fact nothing is forgotten. Rather than the usual reputation meter, you have the Favor/Wrath bars. Each will rise or fall depending upon your decisions, and offer passive stat buffs, but it also means that your positive actions do not erase the choices which irked them. This naturally offers a staggering amount of replay value, and even the first two hours alone have dozens of choices which dramatically alter later events.

The core gameplay itself is largely what you would expect from Obsidian by this point, sticking to the tried and tested Baldur's Gate-style system. While there has been little evolution over past games, it remains a solid build for an RPG, and encourages the use of abilities whilst punishing those who simply spam them. The main difference this time is largely down to the vastly improved pathfinding system, and the greater focus upon combining certain powers to break enemies. In effect, the developer stuck with what worked best in the past, and that seems to have worked for the best here.

With all this said, however, there are a few irritating factors which hold it back from a perfect score. For starters, the old Obsidian issue of front-loading masses of information on the player rears its head again, meaning there's little opportunity to ease yourself into the setting. This can make the start especially daunting given the important story-shaping decisions which take place at the very beginning. In addition to this, certain characteristics and backgrounds have definite advantages over others. Drop a substantial number of points into Lore from the start and choose the Conquest background element, and you'll have a distinct advantage over other characters when it comes to dialogue-related interactions. A better balance in both cases would have definitely improved the first act, but a more notable issue is the control interface. The inventory screen in particular can be a nightmare to navigate, and merely looking through your loot can bring the experience to a screeching halt.

Despite a few minor shortcomings, Tyranny is nevertheless an astounding success even in a month brimming with fantastic games. This is easily the strongest choice-driven dark fantasy outing since the Witcher series, and the astounding level of replay value alongside its strong narrative arc is a testament to Obsidian's skill as a developer. If you have even the slightest investment in fantasy RPGs, make this one an essential purchase for this month.

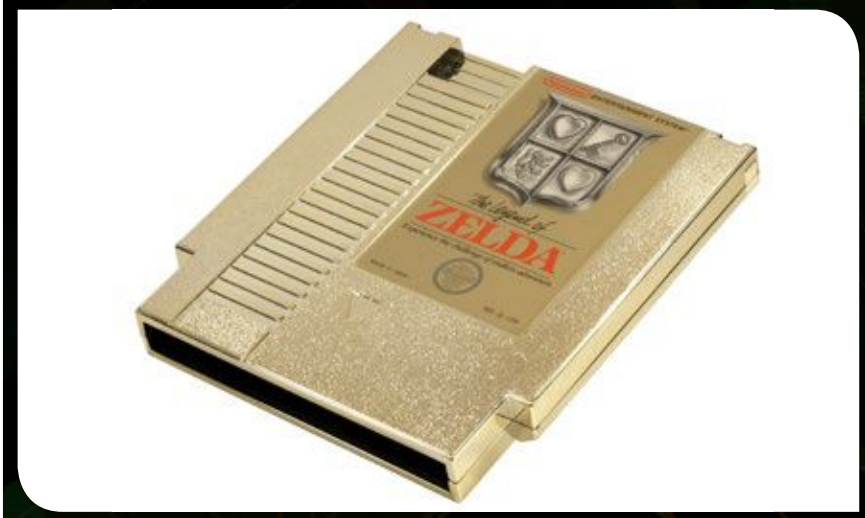
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RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT THE WORLD OF RETRO GAMING WITH CHRIS JACKSON



RETRO YEARS IN REVIEW

Let's be honest, 2016 hasn't been the greatest year for gaming. It hasn't been a total washout, but you'd be hard pushed to find anything truly mind-blowing. Fancy checking out a handful of highlights from years gone by? For the final time in 2016, let's go!

1986

Super Mario Bros 2 (aka *The Lost Levels*) was released exclusively in Japan because Nintendo felt the game was too difficult for western players. *Mario 2* followed the same formula as the original only with added poison 'shrooms, reverse warp zones, elemental hazards and some of the most fiendish platforming ever committed to cartridge. Europe and the USA were given a completely different edition in 1988 (a re-skinned version of a Japanese platformer called *Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic*, which, in turn, would make its way back to Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA*), but this 'original' remained virtually unknown in the west until the release of the *Mario All-Stars* compilation on the Super Nintendo in 1993.

The **Family Computer Disk System** (a floppy drive add-on for the NES) was another Japanese release, with a launch line-up that included a few nondescript sports titles as well as the very first *Legend of Zelda* game. Link's journey to European/USA shores would take another 18 months or so, and by the time it was released in the west its sequel had already been available in Japan for almost an entire year! At least those glorious shiny golden cartridges made up for the delay. In case we forget to mention this particularly useless piece of information in next year's retro review, 1987's NES release of *Zelda* was the first cartridge to include an internal battery for saving gameplay progress. Don't say we never teach you anything!

Metroid and *Akumajo Dracula* (aka *Castlevania*) have become undeniably iconic entries in their respective series, putting inventive twists on the platforming genre by adding an emphasis on exploration to the usual running and jumping formula. Sega's *Master System* console was released in the USA along with *Alex Kidd in Miracle World*, another classic 8-bit platformer. *Dragon Quest* helped redefine the RPG genre by introducing story elements that had never been used before, and is now widely credited as being a major influence behind the *Final Fantasy* franchise. *Kid Icarus* was originally criticised for its high difficulty level, but managed to survive its initial lukewarm reception and has gone on to become a cult favourite among 8-bit aficionados. *Bubble Bobble* brought its infectious theme tune and addictive bubble-bursting to home consoles, and arcade racer *Out Run* caused great excitement with its deluxe cabinet that literally put players in the seat of the car that they were driving in the game.

1996

The biggest news of the year was Nintendo's release of the **N64** console in Japan and the USA, although Europe and Australia would have to wait until early 1997 to get their hands on the latest competitor to Sony's PlayStation (first released in 1995) and the Sega Saturn (available in Japan since late 1994). Coming along much later than its rivals could have been a tough hurdle to overcome, but the N64 had a familiar ace up its sleeve in the form of a chubby little Italian plumber...

Super Mario 64 took our hero into the world of 3D for the first time, putting an entirely new spin on one of gaming's most popular titles. This was by no means the first 3D platformer, but it came along early enough to have an enormous impact on the genre. Being able to go wherever you pleased rather than being restricted to simply moving from left to right was a huge step for the franchise, and getting to explore every previously unimaginable corner of the Mushroom Kingdom's fully fleshed-out multi-coloured worlds (both on the ground and in the air) was a gaming experience on a level that genuinely may never be repeated, unless all this current Virtual Reality nonsense turns out to be about a million times better than they claim...

Duke Nukem 3D was released for the PC, and would go on to be considered alongside *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* as the titles that truly popularised the first-person shooter genre. Alien overlords, pig policemen, nuclear power plants, red light districts, naked women, trips into space - this game



has pretty much got it all. Sweary, violent, and filled with all manner of pop culture references, it's as fun to play today as it was twenty years ago. Stay away from the terrible 2011 sequel though, even if it's the cheapest game in the second hand shop.

The original *Resident Evil* was released on the PlayStation to huge critical acclaim, a Romero-influenced scarefest that set an exceptionally high benchmark for the survival horror genre. Despite countless games and a series of blockbuster films helping Resi become one of gaming's true juggernauts, the S.T.A.R.S. team's reputation has taken a bit of a beating over the last few years. Hopefully 2017's *Resident Evil 7* can recapture some of the earlier series' magic. *Pokémon Green*, *Red*, and *Blue* were released in Japan, kicking off a multi-billion dollar behemoth that, as we are all no doubt aware, continues to make new fans to this very day. *Tomb Raider* débuted on the Sega Saturn shortly before Halloween, followed by PC and PS1 releases a few weeks later, another hugely successful series that has so far spawned over twenty games and a couple of big-budget Hollywood movies, with another cinematic adventure apparently due in 2018. Space-saving honourable mentions go to *Crash Bandicoot*, *Quake,* and *Metal Slug*, all released for the first time in 1996.



2006

Sony's **PlayStation 3** was released in Japan and the USA during the holiday season, with a last-minute shortage of parts seeing its European release delayed until March 2007. The launch line-up was slightly underwhelming, with only *Call of Duty 3* really standing out as anything close to a system seller. Sci-fi shooter *Resistance: Fall Of Man* was at the top of many gamers' 'wants' lists, but the excitement quickly faded when it was revealed that despite the glossy sheen, there was very little innovation going on within the game itself. The PS3's real initial selling point was to be found in its video playback capabilities - no other current console came equipped with an HDMI port and Blu-ray player, although Microsoft added HD output to one of the later 360 iterations.

Nintendo followed Sony's lead and released their new console just a few weeks after the PS3 had arrived. The **Wii** was an immediate hit, selling out across the planet almost instantly thanks to an expertly executed marketing campaign which hyped up the system's motion control capabilities. Everybody in the world knew what *Wii Sports* was (and not a single one of them could master the timing required to play baseball properly), and the less physically inclined among us were lured in by the stunningly beautiful latest chapter in the *Legend of Zelda* series: *Twilight Princess*. Those titles, along with the novel Wiimote/Nunchuk controller and the promise of future entries in the Mario and Metroid franchises, were more than enough to ensure the Wii would continue to shift huge numbers well into the future.

With the three major companies all now having their latest consoles on the market, the seventh generation of gaming was well underway. While each console had their own pros and cons, each had its own dedicated online service that paved the way for the many digital download services we see today. Some folk might be surprised to learn that this sort of thing didn't really exist as recently as ten years ago!

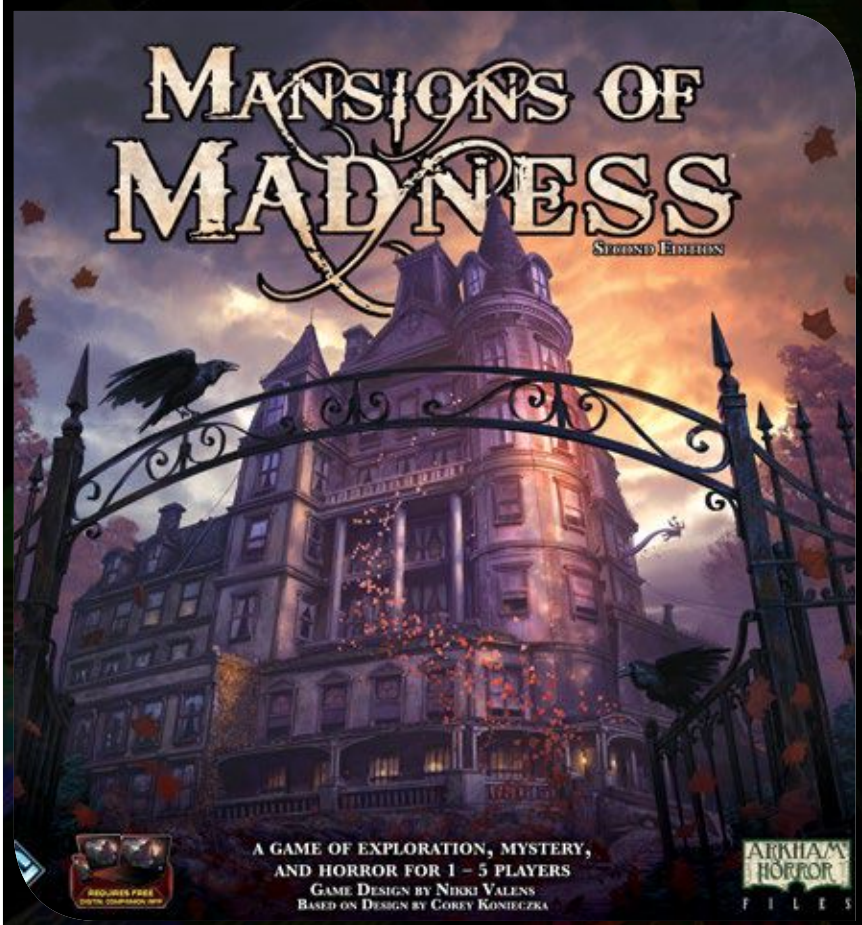


In other news, Rockstar Games courted controversy with *Bully* (aka *Canis Canem Edit*), which is probably best described as *Grand Theft Auto* set in a school. *Okami* was released to rave reviews that sadly didn't translate into massive sales. It's a sort of *Zelda*-style action platformer in which the player takes control of Amaterasu, a Goddess in wolf form who must rid the land of an evil curse by fighting enemies and painting shapes in the sky to solve puzzles. We'll visit this one in more detail at some point now that it's old enough, but if you're interested in giving it a try, we recommend the Wii version as the motion controls are perfect for painting. *We Love Katamari* introduced European gamers to the King of All Cosmos for the first time, completing his quirky requests to roll up increasingly large objects that can then be turned into planets to repopulate the galaxy. Or something. The story's not too important when the gameplay is as fun and addictive as this! Début releases in the now hugely popular *Gears of War*, *Dead Rising,* and *Saints Row* franchises all appeared, alongside sequels such as *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* on PC and Xbox 360 and *New Super Mario Bros DS* on Nintendo's recently released dual-screen handheld system.

Crikey, that seems to be all we've got time for! Huge thanks for reading all this nonsense, and for not complaining to the boss about this column's consistent lack of quality. Quite surprised to have made it to the end of another year, to be honest. Kind of expected to have been packed off to one of those rarely visited dark corners of the Internet by now... Big love to everyone, have a super Christmas and New Year! And see you in a few weeks time!

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE GUIDES YOU THROUGH THE REALM OF TABLETOP GAMING



Mobile phones and tablets are pretty ubiquitous these days. Pretty much everybody has one and we use them for all sorts of things, including table-top gaming. I've talked about using apps in games in the past. Both Renegade Game Studio's *Fuse* and Fantasy Flight's *X-Com* require an app in order to run. However, in both cases they're essentially glorified timers. In *Fuse*'s case, you could replace the phone with a regular timer, though it would be less fun. If you've never played *Fuse*, it's a game about defusing bombs. The bespoke timing app is appropriately sarcastic as you and your friends scramble to solve problems.

Fantasy Flight's latest Cthulhu Mythos-inspired offering, the second edition *Mansions of Madness*, has rather taken the games community by storm, being a rather lovely blend of high technology and traditional table-top gaming. It's part of their 'Arkham' range of games, which is always worth a bit of explanation.

The Cthulhu Mythos is a horror franchise created by H. P. Lovecraft back in the 1920s. Lovecraft wanted to create something that would scare those with no belief in heaven or hell, which it does by underlining mankind's insignificance. It's filled with interesting ideas and monsters and a lot of it is in the public domain, hence the reason why it's so popular amongst games makers. It's also the focus of one of the 'core' roleplaying games: *Call of Cthulhu*, a horror game in which very squishy humans take on impossible horrors (and usually lose).

FFG produced a game called *Arkham Horror* back in 2004, based on a Chaosium game of the same name (which dates back to the '80s). FFG did what they usually do with old licenses: keep the essence of the game but tidy up and improve pretty much everything else. *Arkham Horror* sees you take the role of a 1920s investigator and you dash around the town of Arkham (and maybe other places) in order to save the world from the extra-dimensional horrors that lurk beyond our comprehension. FFG created a distinct 'art style' and some recurring heroes for the game. This style can be seen in subsequent FFG Mythos games, and it's all over *Mansions of Madness*.

Mansion's the closest thing you're ever going to get to a 'Dungeon Crawl' table-top game that is based on the world of Cthulhu. It's a scenario-based miniatures game and yes, you do put together a 'mansion' using the games tiles. Each of the players takes the role of an investigator, and they range from plucky Ashcan Pete, who roams the world with his pet dog Duke punching monsters, to the brilliant scientist Kate Winthrop, who just knows that everything is solvable with science. You get a plastic miniature for each hero, and the box comes with lots of models for monsters as well. The pieces are the sort of standard we expect from FFG. They're not to the same standard as, say, Games Workshop or Guillotine Games, but then this isn't really a minis game.

We have counters and cards to keep track of all the things that will happen to your character as you play. Plenty of tokens to track health and sanity as well as cards for the various occult rituals, weapons and states of mind your character may acquire through play. The counters, board and the like are lovely-looking things, filled to the brim with atmosphere and horrible promise. It's a now instantly recognisable style and very, very atmospheric.

The first edition of *Mansions* was quite fiddly. There was a lot to keep track of and it seemed like a lot of effort to get to each scene. The second edition allows an app to do the heavy lifting here. Not only does a nice voice actor narrate the key bits of the scenario you're playing, it also keeps track of the tokens and tiles. You are still moving models around on a board, rolling dice and solving problems. What the app does is let you track the game's progress efficiently. The STARBURST table-top players discovered that the app also becomes a sort of turn marker as you pass the thing around from player to player. The players move and search around the board. Meanwhile, the app (which is a sort of automated GM) is getting on with tracking where all the monsters are. You the player don't know where the horrors lurk, but the app does. For example, dally in a place for too long and that thing will get out of the

basement and eat you.

As you progress in the game, you feed back to the app some information. For example, if you're trying to crack a safe or explore a new room, the app tells you that you should be rolling dice. You feed that information back to the app and it lets you know the results. It doesn't, however, micro-manage every aspect. The app is very much a tool to make the game happen, not the game itself.

The first edition had a bunch of puzzles for certain situations, and these have been moved to the app. Two of the puzzles are slider-based affairs, the other a sequential guessing game similar to *Mastermind*. The number of 'goes' you have at solving the puzzle each round depends on your character. The app remembers what you've done so far, which means multiple characters can have a pop at solving the same puzzle. Inevitably, it means you're desperately trying to solve a tricky puzzle in as few moves as possible whilst your companions fend off some sort of horrible thing.

Oh yeah, the monsters in *Mansions of Madness* are horrible beasties. In most cases, your best advice is to run away; combat is costly and deadly. It's also sometimes inevitable. Of course, the app throws in atmospheric music as you play (which you can, of course, turn off) but it's so well designed that it seems to be able to pitch perfectly to the player's mood.

The scenarios run from ninety minutes to five hours, with the longer games having a truly epic story behind them. They never quite play the same way twice. Other expansions are on their way and the new game allows you to add in elements from the previous edition, so if you've painted all the models from the old game, don't worry, they'll work in the new game.

Talking about all things Mythos-related, fans of anime-inspired card games may want to check out the *Force to Will* card game, especially as it's about to be turned into a movie. The trailer features a young girl trying to bind the forces of the Mythos onto the written page, and it's a lovely (and powerful) idea. We're certainly looking forward to the movie (and the game's related spin-offs).



Changing the topic entirely, **Roll for Damage** is delighted to learn that vehicular mayhem game *The Devil's Run: Hell's Highway* smashed its Kickstarter goals. Warforged Games will still let you pledge if you wish to pre-order it, though. *Hell's Highway* is a stand-alone add-on to *Devil's Run: Route 666*. This means they're both games in their own right which can be merged into a deeper game.

In case you haven't had the pleasure, *Devil's Run* is a *Mad Max*-style game. We've raved about games in which you get to blow stuff up with cars in the past, but *Devil's Run* really brings together all the bits we love about car combat simulators. For a start, speed is really important and yes, the board grows as you accelerate away from your opponent. Light vehicles can do a lot of damage but break easily whilst more tank-like pieces run the risk of slowing everyone down or being smashed up by swarms of enemies.

The original set, *Route 666*, had really pretty multi-part models, but they are fiddly. *Hell's Highway* has kept the pretty post-apocalyptic feel but sticks to the things that make games like *Car Wars* and *Dark Future* work: lots of violence and high speed. One part classic skirmish game and one part racing game, *Hell's Highway* doesn't have any real new ideas but it has all the really good ideas from previous car violence racing games. If you watched *Fury Road* and felt the urge to get in a tanker and raise hell, then you should check it out.

And finally, all of you LARPers will be excited to learn that UK-based LARP auteur Ian Andrews has announced that he will be running a new LARP game. It promises to be informed by the modern Nordic style, the traditional British approach, combat narratology and Ian's own substantial experience. In other words, something new and exciting, and I can well believe it. For those who don't know Ian, he's the chap behind the award-winning Odyssey LARP and previously ran NWO Games and Grand Design. His new company will be called Carcosa Freelance and will have a game out in 2018. Expect it to sell out faster than a New York second when it's announced.

Ian's spent most of 2016 at events such as the *Harry Potter*-inspired College of Wizardry and the *Resident Evil*-style Black Friday. Both games are highly immersive experiences (Black Friday used sleep deprivation and food scarcity as actual game elements, for example). Given that Ian is one of the handfuls of genuinely innovative and exciting creators in the field today, this is well worth watching. Of course, this is LARP; when done well, it becomes an experience that stays with a handful of people their entire lives. Unfortunately, it's such a tricky medium to do well that only a handful of people ever get to play, which is why it will never be truly mainstream. +



Ed Fortune can tweeted at **@ed_fortune** and contacted via **ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com**
He's always interested to know what games you're playing. Unless it's *Monopoly*.

WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM AROUND THE WEB THIS MONTH WITH JACK BOTTOMLEY

Merry Sith-mas

Merry Christmas readers - depending on when you are reading this page. Now, here at STARBURST we do not always get what we want at Christmas but we like to console ourselves by thinking 'well, at least we aren't Darth Vader'. Think about it, he may lead the forces of the Empire but he will never know the comfort of some warm and cosy slippers, he will never know what it is to sit with his entire family at the dinner table and worst of all, nobody is brave enough to pull a cracker with him! Yet, despite all this, it is nice to know that the destroyer of the Jedi Order and infinitely powerful asthmatic can still be Christmassy, as this joyous jumper from **merchoid.com** suggests. This knitted jumper shows Vader donning a Santa hat and asserting that he finds 'Your Lack of Cheer Disturbing', so smile for goodness' sake, he still is (we think) and he looks like a gnawed potato under that superbly polished helmet, so what's your excuse?

Speaking of **Star Wars**, Gareth Edwards' **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story** is in cinemas now, so you may know whether it's an Alderaan-sized disaster or a bigger success than a rebellion attack run. However, to celebrate both the occasion and the season, why not add to your **Star Wars** Christmas, with this **disneystore.co.uk Rogue One** Death Trooper tree decoration? Nothing makes your tree look more impressive than a high ranking Empire official hanging off the branch and threatening Santa to leave some gifts... or else. However, if your tastes are more original trilogy, then we have the perfect object. After last issue's snow globe-centric Emporium, we were inspired to continue the theme this issue and it doesn't get much better than this Exogorth Space Slug snow globe from thinkgeek.com, which pays homage to the classic sequence in The Empire Strikes Back.



LACK OF CHEER DISTURBING KNITTED JUMPER – £36.99
AVAILABLE FROM MERCHOID.COM

ROGUE ONE: STAR WARS STORY DEATH TROOPER CHRISTMAS TREE ORNAMENT - £13.99
AVAILABLE FROM DISNEYSTORE.CO.UK

STAR WARS EXOGORTH SPACE SLUG SNOW GLOBE – $19.99
AVAILABLE FROM THINKGEEK.COM

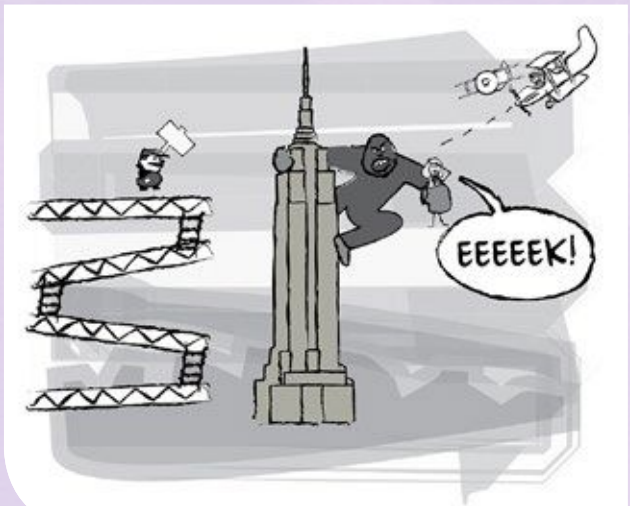














Coming Attractions

The New Year is almost upon us, which means lavish/lazy (delete as applicable) gifts, stressful reunions, mass food consumption and, most importantly of all, a whole new movie calendar year ahead of you. Hopefully, we've whet your appetites for 2017, but as we were looking ahead, we found some eye-catching merchandise. Starting with a delicious shirt over at **beltsbucklestees.com**, which was inspired by the scene-stealing Groot from **Guardians of the Galaxy,** the sequel to which is dancing its way to cinemas next year. We felt this shirt was very appropriate, as it re-imagines Groot as Tony the Tiger selling his own brand of grrrrreat cereal - that's everything a growing plant needs (minus the Miracle-Gro).

However, as the MCU's roots widen, so too does the aspiring DC Universe with Patty Jenkins' anticipated **Wonder Woman** and Zack Snyder's **Justice League** hitting cinemas in 2017. After a bumpy ride thus far, a lot is riding on these movies. And as we were exploring DC's upcoming capers, we happened across this fantastic wall print by MYantz from **etsy.com** that sees the deceased (for now) Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman imagined in sugar skull form; it's pretty great, though we do wonder why DC Characters and skulls go so well together (à la Suicide Squad posters)?

However, it's not all comic book heroes next year, we also have the mighty **Power Rangers** returning to the big screen, as they get a - hopefully - fun new reboot, so what better way to contain your excitement for their return than in this adult (yes, adults can dress as **Power Rangers** too and no, it isn't childish) bathrobe from **amazon.co.uk**. And as we mention fun clothing, **grindstore.com** has some superb T-shirts, cleverly designed under the 'badly drawn movies' range. And with the impressive looking **Kong: Skull Island** and Danny Boyle's promising (that trailer) and long awaited sequel **T2: Trainspotting** both arriving next year, we were especially drawn (see what we did there) to the '30s King Kong skyscraper shirt and the **Trainspotting** inspired design - based on the infamous toilet sequence, complete with dead baby (dark guys, really dark).

GROOT FLAKES T-SHIRT - £13.00
AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEES.COM

JUSTICE LEAGUE SUGAR SKULL 11" X 17" PRINT W/ BATMAN, SUPERMAN AND WONDER WOMAN - £16.18
AVAILABLE FROM ETSY.COM

POWER RANGERS ADULT FLEECE BATHROBE & SWIM SUIT COVER UP - £45.00
AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.CO.UK

BADLY DRAWN MOVIES T-SHIRTS - INSPIRED BY TRAINSPOTTING (TOILET) AND KING KONG - £10.99 EACH
BOTH AVAILABLE FROM GRINDSTORE.COM





WORDS : ANIMAL JOHNS
PHOTOS: MCM EXPO

MCM BIRMINGHAM COMIC CON
The NEC
North Ave,
Marston Green,
Birmingham B40 1NT
November 19th - 20th, 2016

The behemoth that is MCM roles out another of their highly successful convention weekends, this time at Birmingham's colossal NEC arena. The November Birmingham show has traditionally been the Memorabilia one - more focused on celebrity guests than the more traditional Comic Cons and this year, they have really pulled the big guns out to appease the crowds keen to meet the stars of the big and small screen.

Heading up the signing tables there was a pair of actors making a very rare appearance. Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood may not be household names or instantly recognisable, but their importance to sci-fi and film fans in general is not to be ignored. They were the main characters in Stanley Kubrick's seminal **2001: A Space Odyssey**. As Dr Dave Bowman and Dr Frank Poole respectively, the pair became iconic and it was quite a coup to have them along for the event. Naturally, they were a big draw and it was great to see them so well received.

There was plenty of other star draws, too. Flash Gordon himself, Sam J. Jones was another popular attraction, and he was joined by Klytus, actor Peter Wyngarde (although he's arguable better known as '70s TV action hero Jason King). **Star Wars** fans had a whole host of guests to meet, while fans of the more mainstream (and Memorabilia has a tradition of catering for those people the other more comic/sci-fi based signing events often neglect) had some great celebrities to choose from. Older fans had the likes of Sally Geeson (from TV's **Bless This House**), Monty Python's Carol Cleveland, **Rocky Horror**'s Patricia Quinn, and horror star Lynn Lowry (**Shivers**), who were all on hand to meet fans. Fans of more modern TV fare had a group of stars from **Game of Thrones**, **Red Dwarf**, and a former Doctor (Peter Davison) to enjoy. **Arrow**'s Slade Wilson/Deathstroke Manu Bennet delighted fans when he took part in a Q&A and had a fan put him in a headlock. There was even a little something 'for the dads' in the form of the 'Glamour Girl Mansion', where you could meet various models and personalities from the more 'top shelf' world of cult entertainment.

Away from the star guests, there was the usual array of stalls and entertainment for attendees. The folks from Slam Wrestling held demonstrations and wowed crowds with the athletic ability of their members, and, of course, there was the usual now-obligatory Cosplay Masquerade.

The big draw for any of these events for many is the chance to dress and act as your hero, and MCM Birmingham was certainly no exception, with the quality of costumes on display being absolutely mind-blowing.

With such a varied amount of things to do, it's safe to say MCM Birmingham Comic Con was a huge success; with the organisational experience that MCM have, it's no wonder they continue to excel with well-attended - but more importantly, well run events. Don't miss the next one.

*Find out more about MCM events by heading to **mcmcomiccon.com**.*





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CHILDREN UNDER 5 GO FREE

GUESTS INCLUDE:



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HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS
KINGSGLAIVE: FINAL FANTASY XV



TIM ROSE
RETURN OF THE JEDI
THE FORCE AWAKENS



GARETH DAVID-LLOYD
TORCHWOOD | DOCTOR WHO
SATURDAY ONLY



RICHARD OLDFIELD
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK | LIFEFORCE
OMEN III | BLAKE'S 7 | SPACE 1999
SUNDAY ONLY



ANDREW LEE POTTS
PRIMEVAL | LUCKY MAN | ALICE



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*GUESTS ARE SUBJECT TO WORK COMMITMENTS AND MAY CANCEL AT ANY TIME. GUESTS CHARGE FOR AUTOGRAPHS. PHOTOGRAPHS OF GUESTS WILL BE AVAILABLE. NOT ALL GUESTS ARE APPEARING BOTH DAYS.

SIV STARBURST

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Oh we do like to geek beside the seaside!

PAUL MOUNT'S TV ZONE

This month, we head back to school for CLASS - the latest spin-off from the worlds of DOCTOR WHO, fly high with SUPERGIRL and get possessed by THE EXORCIST...

If you've ever lain awake at nights wondering what would happen if TV scientists spliced the DNA of **Doctor Who**'s previous two successful spin-offs **Torchwood** (for adults) and **The Sarah Jane Adventures** (for the nippers – in theory) to create a new hybrid, then it looks like you'll finally be able to get some well-deserved shut-eye because now, at last, we know. The result of this morbid experiment has gifted us **Class**, one of those fiddly streaming on iPlayer/BBC Three shows that now exist in a sort of telly limbo beyond the boundaries of what we understand as the TV schedule and available, drip-fed across eight weeks (after a two-episode début) to anyone who wants to watch it whenever they fancy. **Class** arrives at a very odd time, a **Doctor Who** spin-off at a period when the parent show is stumbling through an unfortunate slump in its popularity and when, in all honesty, the last thing it needs or deserves is another show set, however broadly, in its universe. Without the benefit of already established and much-loved characters to draw in an interested audience (apart from an appearance by Peter Capaldi's Doctor in the first episode, which reminds us how good he can be when he's given less featherweight comic cuts material to work with), **Class** has to work much harder than its spin-off predecessors to make its mark. And seven episodes into its run, I have to say it's not made much of an impression on me or the audience it's aimed at, even with the proviso that it's near-impossible to judge how well a show is doing when it's streamed online rather than subject to the whims and caprices of a curated TV schedule.

You see, I'm not entirely sure why **Class** actually exists. Apart from its first episode and its ongoing connection with Coal Hill, it's barely a spin-off at all; **Class**' raison d'etre appears to be some hazy desire to hitch a ride on the Young Adult phenomenon which has dragged sullen teens into the cinema to see the likes of **The Hunger Games** and **The Maze Runner**. Its creator/writer, Patrick Ness, has form in the YA genre, of course, so he's probably the best man for the job of bringing something like this to the screen. But with its screamingly unsubtle similarities to the likes of **Buffy** and **The Vampire Diaries** – dialogue in the first episode even draws attention to it – **Class** doesn't seem to have anything new to offer apart from warmed-over ideas hewn from a seam already well-mined to the point of exhaustion in slightly less self-conscious American TV shows.

To bring you up to speed if the show has eluded you thus far, **Class** is a contemporary drama set in and around Coal Hill School (sorry, it's an *Academy* now), where the Doctor's TV adventures began in 1963 and where, more recently, his confusingly ill-fated companion Clara worked as a teacher. A rift in space and time (*another* one?) has opened up in the school thanks to the release of artron energy from frequent visits to the school by the Doctor's TARDIS (I can count about three in the fifty-odd year history of **Doctor Who** but I didn't make this stuff up). The Doctor has helpfully dumped a renegade alien teenage prince and his surly female bodyguard into the school and, across a slightly tortuous first episode, they're forced to work with a handful of other pupils at the school to defeat an attack by the fiery Shadow Kin aliens who have spilled through this 'rift'. Like a teen Torchwood, the kids and Miss Quill, their teacher/surrogate Captain Jack, played



CLASS

with well restrained enthusiasm by former **Coronation Street** star Katherine Kelly, find themselves reluctantly tasked with protecting the Earth (well, the bit with Coal Hill Academy in it) from incursions by outlandish aliens, dragons, and energy forces. Yeah, *that* again…

On the whole, **Class** has pretty much left me cold. I suspect that this might in no small measure be because the show is punching towards a much younger audience than me (I'm a rather mature fellow) but then I remembered that I was watching **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** when I was [massive coughing fit]-years old and that's still nudging the upper echelons of my 'top ten TV faves of all time' list. I think the real problem is that in working hard to make an impact, **Class** is just trying *too* hard and there's nothing of real originality here to make the show compelling as drama or as science fiction. The whole premise is just **Torchwood** through the back door and the cast of teens are, in many ways, far less mature and well-adjusted than Sarah Jane's Bannerman Road gang. This lot snog, fight, and swear but they still have mums and dads on their backs and all those pesky and slightly tedious angsty coming-of-age dilemmas covered less self-consciously in a dozen more accomplished American dramas. They're also not an especially likeable bunch. They've been thrown together by circumstance and they don't really have much of a rapport between them. They don't seem to enjoy spending time in each other's company and despite some leaden attempts at humour, there's not much joy in their lives and absolutely no sense that they'd want to spend any time together if they didn't have to. It might be an interesting, if deeply flawed dynamic, but it certainly doesn't help the audience warm to the characters or want to spend forty-odd minutes in their company week after week. Compare and contrast with Joss Whedon's **Buffy** – we have to because the show's done it itself. **Buffy**'s Scooby Gang were



SUPERGIRL

effortlessly cheery and good-humoured regardless of whatever demon or demi-god was tearing up Sunnydale every week; they saved the world with a smile and a quip and we loved them for it. We get none of that with the **Class** bunch. The series seems so determined to tick every demographic in the book it's forgotten to turn its characters into people we care about and want to learn more about.

But then I remind myself again that **Class** isn't aimed at me and if nothing else, I commend the BBC for chasing that elusive teen-ish TV audience that rarely finds the time or inclination to sit in front of the TV and commit itself to an ongoing drama. I'm not sure what impact **Class** has made on them, if any; there's precious little buzz about the show and its iPlayer viewing figures don't seem to be anything to write an essay about. I've found the occasional episode vaguely engaging but it's not exactly 'appointment-to-view' TV and comes across as a show that needs quite a bit of work done to tighten up its format, lighten up its characters and give it its own identity instead of several borrowed from other better-realised shows. Whether TV's Board of Governors give the series another term to buck up its ideas remains to be seen; my gut instinct, however, is that it's likely to be **Class** dismissed any time soon.



CLASS

SUPERGIRL

I've never really enjoyed the closest of relationships with The CW's DC superhero shows. I've always found **Arrow** a bit wilfully dour, I couldn't really get on with **The Flash** because Grant Gustin still looks like he shouldn't be wearing long trousers just yet, and the stress of trying to keep up with the relentless manic pace of **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** was altogether too much for a man of my advancing years. So I can't say I was hugely heartened to hear that **Supergirl**, ditched by CBS at the end of its first season, was leaping across to join her caped cousins at The CW, but what the hell. I'd enjoyed the first season and although I had some misgivings when it was announced that Superman (now played by Tyler Hoechlin) would be making some guest appearances (excuse me, isn't this Supergirl's show? We've already got a big screen Superman, dull as ditchwater as he is…) in the second season, I thought I owed it to the lovely Melissa Benoist to at least take a look at her sophomore shenanigans. But happily Season Two (Sky 1 here in the UK) is quite the revelation. The season opener was one of the most joyous bits of TV I've seen in months, not least because of its introduction of - wait for it - hands-down the best screen Man of Steel since the glory days of Christopher Reeve.

It's true, I tells ya! Hoechlin just nails both the last son of Krypton and, from what we've seen so far, his alter ego Clark Kent, with a deftness and lightness that utterly eludes the big screen Man of Solid Oak, Henry Cavill. Of course, much of his - and indeed, the whole show's - success is down to witty, fast-paced scripts and a generally softer and more

likeable characterisation that made Supes' guest slots in the first two episodes of his cousin's first CW season such a success. We'll see more of this new Superman later in the season, no doubt (it'd be a shame to waste the costume), but his guest run early in Season Two – and a few other cosmetic changes brought about by the move to The CW has allowed **Supergirl** to find its feet, - embrace the character's mythology and potential, and tell the sorts of stories it sometimes seemed too self-conscious to do on the ratings-chasing CBS.

There's just so much going on in **Supergirl** it's almost hard to keep tabs on it all. The show's writers are adroitly hurling a gazillion ideas at a time at the show and every character in an already enormous cast has got something meaty to work with, whether it's Martian Manhunter's discovery that he's not the last Martian, James Olsen's (surprisingly sudden) decision to become a masked vigilante (cheekily brandishing a shield like a certain character popularised by Marvel), the mysterious machinations of Lex Luther's too-good-to-be-true sister Lena, and a remarkably well-handled arc for Supergirl/Kara's adoptive sister Alex as she struggles to come to terms with her own sexuality. More fun for Supergirl herself, too, with the arrival of new alien refugee Mon-El from Krypton's neighbouring planet that, if my ears haven't deceived me (and I suspect they have), appears to be called Dachshund [*ahem... Daxam - Ed*]. Like Cara, Mon-El has extraordinary powers but he doesn't quite yet know what to do with them...

Supergirl's move to The CW has been an unparalleled success and allowed it to really embrace its comic book roots free from CBS's nervy need to pull in chunky viewing figures. Now, on the smaller but no less beautifully formed CW Network, it can happily roll along with a more modest audience and tell the sorts of huge, fun, thrilling and downright daft stories it might not have been able to do in the harsh light of a bigger and brasher network. It's now become a highlight of my TV week; **Supergirl** can take me up, up and away any time she fancies...

THE EXORCIST

Count me amongst the legion of the damned who really didn't think that a TV series based on the 1973 horror classic **The Exorcist** was a very good idea. I'm not the world's greatest flag-waver for the film but I appreciate its importance and its significance; my concern was as much that this appeared to be just another example of American TV's current lazy propensity for churning out TV series based on old film titles - *any* old film titles (**Frequency**?? *Seriously*?!) - as a disgraceful violation of a cherished seminal classic. Six episodes into **The Exorcist**, though (screening on Fox in the US and Syfy - *Syfy?!* - for UK audiences) and my head has been turned just like poor Regan in the original film. Episode One (directed by **Rise of the Planet of the Apes**' Rupert Wyatt) was impressive enough but the show has really flexed its storytelling muscles as it's taken the familiar tale of one family's torment as their youngest member is obsessed by something malevolent and extremely supernatural and flipped it on its head and turned it inside out. The show was already gripping enough even before it delivered its block-knocking-off moment at the end of Episode Five (why is it always Episode Five? The first season of **Wayward Pines** pulled the same trick), when everything I thought I'd come to terms with about the series was pulled out from underneath me and the show not only more than justified its existence but suddenly became essential viewing rather than just a time-passing curiosity.

If there's a problem with **The Exorcist,** then it's certainly not apparent from its stylish production and quality cast including Geena Davis (Thelma from **Thelma and Louise**; or was it Louise? One of my favourite films and I'm damned if I can ever remember who played who) as tormented mom Angela Rance (yeah, right...) and Brit thesp Ben Daniels as rogue exorcist Father Marcus Keane. This is a prestige production that, like **Supergirl**, finds itself on entirely the wrong network. Hamstrung by being broadcast on Fox in the US, **The Exorcist** is visually tame and timid where it should be ground-breaking – no foul-mouthed demons and vomit-spewing here, although it does push the envelope with some graphic-as-we-can-get-away-with gore, mutilation and mild scares. But this is a slick, wellmade and propulsive show that would be better served on a gloves-off network like Showtime or AMC where its tepid ratings wouldn't necessarily have been the problem they're likely to be for Fox, who are almost certain to pull the plug at the end of this ten-episode run.

I can't and won't say much more about **The Exorcist** because I'm hoping I've teased it enough for you to go and seek it out if you'd given it a miss or written it off as a lazy cash-in. **Exorcist** purists may prove harder to convince and whilst years of cheap demonic possession knock-off movies have taken all the real scares away from the concept, this is a well-crafted, intelligent series with a truly killer twist - *go, Episode Five!* - that deserves at least some level of appreciation before, as seems likely, it shuffles off the mortal TV coil forevermore. But don't just take my word for it; the power of **TV Zone** compels you... ✦


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Turns out that hard sci-fi and bananas are strange, but highly satisfying bedfellows.

Before myself and my undead offspring bring you the **IT'S ONLY MOVIE AWARDS 2016**, it is my pleasure to sing the praises of a barnstorming entry into the annals of *hard sci-fi*, and the joy of smelling of bananas…

Hard sci-fi has long been an obsession of mine. It is also a contentious term that results in much arguing amongst geeks, who often don't really get the term. Hard sci-fi does NOT mean any sci-fi movie that you just happen to like. It relates to the purity of the movie, in my opinion. To be classified hard sci-fi, the movie in question could not really exist without its sci-fi components. **Star Wars** does not belong in this category. It is a blockbuster Hollywood movie, designed to be accepted by the mainstream. The story could easily be translated into a western or a saga about the uprisings against our historical colonialism. Whereas possibly the most perfect hard sci-fi movie of all time, **2001: A Space Odyssey,** literally collapses without the sci-fi elements. It was also designed to appeal to fans of sci-fi movies and novels, whilst attempting to convey an incredibly intellectual narrative.

I would include **Gattaca**, **Twelve Monkeys**, **Blade Runner**, **Another Earth**, **Metropolis** and the original **Solaris** in this category. I would not include films such as **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**, the new **Star Trek** movies (although **Star Trek: The Motion Picture** is definitive hard sci-fi), **Gravity** or **Aliens**. Hard sci-fi has science fiction hardcoded into its DNA. To me, there is nothing finer than great hard sci-fi, which is why anyone producing a pseudo-cerebral movie pretending to be of this type instantly gains my wrath. The last such con job was the dreadful **Interstellar**, which the Holy Nolan tried to spoon-feed to us as the real deal. In actual fact, it was a pile of bollocks that ended with just utter bibble and nonsense involving communication via pushing books off a shelf. This was a detestable attempt to appeal to those moronic hipster types that love to chin stroke over some craft ales in a bar, usually around the corner from an art gallery that they have never been to. Sadly, for me 2016 had been a wilderness for the hard sci-fi aficionado. It is not to say that there has been a dearth of intelligent genre movies. My own favourite movie of 2016 is the compelling **Anomalisa**. Extremely intelligent and moving – but no sci-fi anywhere in sight.

I have long had a theory why sci-fi has been struggling to make an impact lately in either the hard or mainstream variety. I feel that since **Iron Man** arrived on the scene in 2008 there has been a phenomena in play that I refer to as *The Superhero Squeeze*. Whenever a huge fad or trend in movies explodes, there will be a natural squeezing out of some other genre areas. Unlike horror, always seems to survive and prosper during any change of viewer appetites, sci-fi has often suffered. You only have to peruse the covers of STARBURST since I took over as editor in 2011. Every year during my tenure has been dominated by comic book properties. 2016 has been no different, and with an absence of commercially successful sci-fi properties, it never bodes well for the chances of something on the clever side turning up. Then, in the dying embers of 2016, along comes **Arrival**…

Arrival is an astonishing piece of hard sci-fi. It is also one of the best science fiction films to be released this decade. On a personal level, I found it to be a compelling and authentic rendition of the *first contact* scenario. It has been tackled many times in recent cinema. **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**, **The Day the Earth Stood Still**, **Independence Day**, and many others have tried to answer the question of what would happen on the day we found out that we were not alone in the universe. Until such a question is answered in real terms, it will continue to invite filmmakers to engage with this rich storytelling trope.

Although it revisits well-trodden ground, from the very beginning, **Arrival** feels like the genuine explanation of what would likely happen. It is a breath of fresh air. It realistically conveys the fact that the simple act of communication might be an almost impossible barrier to overcome. There is so much to like about this film and its incendiary, slow and methodical pacing. It has a narrative that slowly unfolds, like some type of reverse engineering of origami. In this movie, Amy Adams provides us with a tour de force in her role as Dr Louise Banks, a world-renowned linguist. She's called into service by the army to try to establish meaningful contact with alien *heptapods* that have arrived in twelve enormous vessels that appear to be made from a rock-type substance. These crafts are located in seemingly unconnected locations around the globe, causing massive media paranoia and a mixed response from the various governments. Distrust and paranoia have the world in their grip, and it is a race against time for Banks and her mathematician colleague, Ian Donnelly, played by Jeremy Renner (an actor who I have many times suggested can't actually act, and makes a shite leading man), to make some kind of breakthrough in understanding the alien language.

It is no overstatement to say that Amy Adams dominates this movie, and proves that whilst some saddos like to replay *that* bath scene in the dreary **Batman v Superman**, Amy Adams is actually one of the best actors in the business. It would be criminal for her not to get some Oscar recognition for her performance in **Arrival**. I also feel that I must, for the first time, take back my comments on Jeremy Renner. I have long derided him in this column. I felt his acting wasn't up to much. I thought he was the weakest character in **Avengers Assemble**. I didn't reckon he had the chops to be a leading man. Well, he was absolutely superb in **Arrival**, so I admit that I have been too harsh about him. Clearly, given decent material the guy is pretty damn good on screen. He proved to be a perfect partner for Adams, and helped to progress her story arc, whilst still managing to portray a well-rounded and likeable bloke.

Whilst the movie is slowly and deliberately paced, it is nonetheless gripping from start to finish. Banks and Donnelly enter the alien vessel for the first time via a square upwards shaft that instantly converts into a corridor replete with gravity. They then begin a long and protracted series of sessions with two heptapods they christen *Abbott* and *Costello*. From this moment on, it is a race against time to make some kind of meaningful conversation - a conversation that would reveal why they have arrived, and whether their intentions are friendly or otherwise. Amy Adams is a revelation in these scenes. Her attempts at empathy with these creatures and the ongoing narrative about the loss of her child irradiate from the screen. You would have to have a heart of stone not to be affected by watching this amazing screen performance. Even the key reveal towards the end is handled with absolute finesse by the writers and the performers onscreen. This is no M. Night



Hey-ho, it's the amazing Grace Randolph. I know a fairly fantastic place that she can park that hammer!

Shyamalan *twist*, it's a confirmation of something that you subconsciously knew all along. This entire movie was crafted so brilliantly that I am now beginning to have high hopes for **Blade Runner 2049**. It may be a sequel that seems unnecessary, bordering on heresy, but if Denis Villeneuve can direct a masterpiece like this, then he might just be able to pull it off...

My **Arrival** experience was also enhanced by a 4D aspect. I had purchased a lotion called *Sympathy for the Skin* from *Lush* in the Manchester Arndale Centre. I had used way too much of it prior to leaving the house, and as a consequence every impactful moment was punctuated by a waft of bananas. I cannot possibly recommend this enough as the optimum way to experience **Arrival**.

Arrival is everything that crap films like **Interstellar** attempt to be. It's an incredibly intelligent, spellbinding sci-fi movie. My favourite sci-fi movie of 2016. **Arrival** is a movie that has reminded me why I took this job. If you have given this flick a pass due to the understated trailer, then I urge you to rectify that mistake as soon as possible.

[Cue fanfare. Again, it's Danny Elfman doing the honours. Williams is busy with some Disney movies, Giacchino managed to turn a Stormtrooper cameo into the **Rogue One** gig, and Zimmer is still hanging up when we call. That guy is all drums anyway...]

J: Ladies, gentlemen and **Blair Witch** fans, it's time to reveal who gets a coveted Brozzer. Welcome to the **It's Only A Movie Awards** for 2016! Hosted by myself and a young man who definitely does not smell of bananas - my adopted living-impaired offspring, Zack the Zombaby.

Z: *munch* [puts his peanut M&Ms away]

J: We will start as usual with the **Ben Kingsley Award** for the biggest tosser in the world of genre. Every year, I hope that we will have no-one to give this award to, and every year some numpty chucklehead manages to behave like a total pair of clown shoes. This year we celebrate the twattishness of...

Z: Grace Randolph.

J: Yes indeedy. Grace was very much under pressure during the early part of 2016, when she took Internet trolling to previously unreached echelons. We all remember a little movie called **Batman v Superman: Yawn of Justice**? Well, you may also recall the less than amazing reviews during the month of its release. Those of us that are not feeble-minded may have concluded that this was due to the fact that the movie was a badly made and misjudged load of cobblers. Not Grace Randolph. She decided to hunt down every negative comment on social media and *expose* them as to their true purpose!

Z: Did she find out that they were being naughty?

J: No, son. Sadly, it transpired that Grace Randolph is a total nutbag. Apparently, every one of these negative reviews was part of a global conspiracy by Disney, who had paid said reviewers in cold hard cash to sabotage any DC movie, and therefore secure the domination of comic book films on behalf of Marvel Studios. She started first on moviegoers via Twitter, and by the end of the first week had turned her attentions to AMC movie critic John Campea, accusing the poor sod of directly taking Disney dollars to trash talk **BvS**. In reality, he had actually said he liked it, but by this stage reality had nothing to do with her narrative. John Campea then took the unusual step of responding to her in depth via a YouTube video. You can easily find it online, and to be fair, he absolutely destroys her.

Grace then found yours truly on Twitter. I had just sent a confirmation tweet to a reader, saying that I had not liked **BvS**, but that they should make their own mind up about it. The first tweet off Grace Nutbag was just a load of dollar signs. My response that it was the wrong currency led to a torrent of abuse, as I was informed that STARBURST was obviously being paid by Disney to write the review written by our very own Andrew Pollard. I can confirm that both myself and Andrew would have happily taken Disney cash (or a few weeks at Disneyland!) to write a negative review of a flick that only really managed to waste three hours of a perfectly good piss-up in London. Tragically, neither myself nor Andrew were ever offered any Disney dosh.

The abuse went on for days, and I had started to reply that she smelt of bins to every message, before finally just blocking her and deleting the messages. By way of further disclosure about this shonky bonkers nutbag, Grace Randolph hosts an excruciating YouTube channel called *Beyond the Trailer* in which she pretends to be an industry insider, refers to popular opinion as *group think* *shudder* and (wait for the penny to drop here!) was let go by Marvel Comics in 2015. Yup! Marvel binned this sad harpy off. Now you don't suppose that could have anything to do with this? Just saying...

Z: Is that the lady that you said was a bi...

J: Yes. OK. Moving swiftly on. It's this year's recipient of the **Lars Von Trier Award** for most pretentious fantasy movie.

Z: It's **The Kneeling Demon**.

J: **The** *cough* **Neon Demon** was to be the latest opus from Nicholas Winding Refn, director of **Drive** and **Only God Forgives**. Whilst **Drive** was a mesmerising and stylish arthouse flick, it managed to still be a mainstream hit and quite accessible. Anyone expecting Refn to go even more commercial (as many directors do at this stage) would instead be confronted with a beautiful looking film, but a plot so layered and subtle it was lost on most moviegoers. **The Neon Demon** was a stylish noir horror film with a gorgeous soundtrack which totally failed to connect with the public, and ended up tragically being one of the biggest box office disasters of the year. I think he may have got the message, though. His next project? He wants to do a Batgirl movie.

Z: Is this what you call autistic integrity?

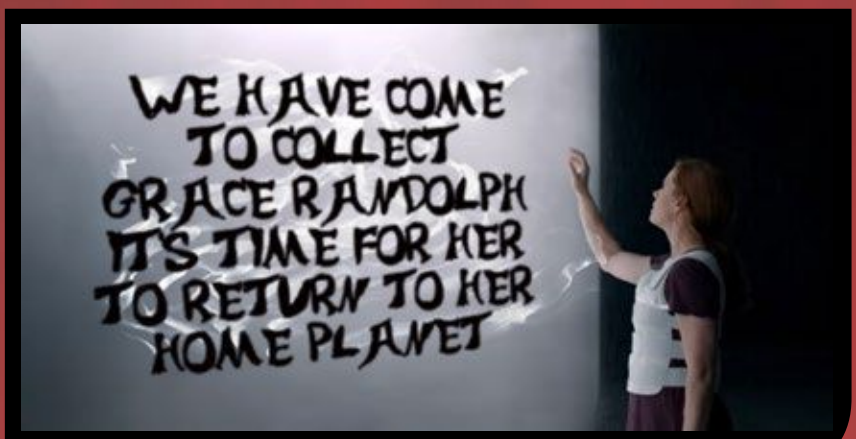
J: No it's artis... Actually, your mushed up brain might be right on that one! Next, it's the **Mark David Chapman Award** for most moronic fan base.

Z: Oh no! The winnerz are the collective fans of **The Blair Witch Project**. Does this means that they will start being silly again?

J: Well, son, with these assclowns you never know. An overrated brainlessly shite horror flick demands an equally brainless fan base. After STARBURST published my forthright condemnation of **Blair Witch,** the Internet exploded with protestations from fans of the original movie that had not even seen this pseudo-sequel. The magazine website, Twitter, Facebook - nowhere was a safe haven from them. This continued until the world got to see this offensive piece of forest porn, and it became one of the biggest box office duds of the year. These sad little puppies are now coming to terms with a world where a misogynistic sociopath is the next US President and their woeful franchise is buried in the woods forever.

Z: It sounds like they have nothing to live for?

J: I agree. Perhaps they should head out to the Burkittsville Woods with a rope, find a tree and...



At last, the reason for the arrival of the heptapods is revealed...

Z: Dad! Don't be horrid!

J: Hairy muff, time to reveal the winner of the **Richard Donner Meets Edward Scissorhands Award** for crimes against editing.

Z: The winner is **Suicide Squad**. Aww... I liked that one. Harley Quinn was dead good!

J: Some people did, others not so much. Love it or hate it, studio interference resulted in two tonally different movies, and man, can you see the joins? Warners in their *wisdom* preferred the style of the trailer made by Trailer Park, and were spurred on to come up with a more conventional cut after the **Batman v Superman** debacle. Out went the darker, edgier tone established by director David Ayer (which, unlike Bats and Supes, might have worked with these characters), in came pop art graphics and reshot scenes of comedy moments. As a consequence, Jared Leto is known to be very vocal about the loss of many of his gangsta Joker scenes. We may never get to see the original cut, and the released version is flawed, but it's still actually the best DC movie so far...

Still on the negative side, now it's time for the **Amy's Bathtub Award** for worst fantasy movie...

Z: It's **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**. I haven't seen it all. I keep falling asleep.



J: So did everyone else! Grace Nutbag may be fighting its corner, but the view from fandom was fairly unanimous. A shitbag shuffle of a sequel to the aborted **Man of Steel 2** that actually managed to double down on many of the criticisms. "*Save Martha!*" is a phrase that will haunt DC for many years to come!
Now it's time for the **Adam Wingard Memorial Award** for worst horror movie.

Z: Oh dear. It's **Blair Witch**.

J: The fans are minging, and so is this film. **Blair Witch** is the worst movie I have seen in 2016, and one of the worst movies I have ever seen. It's a talentless disgrace. Everyone involved should rethink their careers at this point.

Now we switch genres for the **I Used to Be Data Award** for most disappointing sci-fi movie. Which is...

Z: Independence Day: Resurgence.

J: It may not be the worst sci-fi movie, but the let-down was immense. **Independence Day** had a lot of love amongst many genre fans as an updated and ever so slightly jingoistic remake of **The War of the Worlds**. This was simply 'Meh'. The tacked-on teaser for yet another sequel excited no-one.

Z: Can we do some good ones now?

J: We certainly can. Next up we have the **This is How it's Done Mr Nolan Award** for best sci-fi movie. Which is...

Z: Arrival.

J: Without a doubt the sci-fi movie of 2016, and a future classic. Carved out of the same black obsidian slab as **2001: A Space Odyssey**, **The Man Who Fell to Earth**, and many others. A triumph for director Denis Villeneuve. Now onto the **Bald But Not Ben Kingsley Award** for best horror film. Rip that envelope open...

Z: It's **Green Room**. Why was the nice man on **Star Trek** making friends with neon nasties?

J: That's neo-Nazis. Don't worry, he is only pretending. But Patrick Stewart does pretend very well indeed. As survival horror goes, it doesn't get tenser than this. Great performances, great script, fantastic pacing. The only downside was knowing that poor Anton Yelchin was only beginning to show what he was capable of with this frenetic portrayal of a man turned by circumstances into a cornered animal.

Z: Only Lovers Left Alive is my favourite film. I can still watch him if I miss him.

J: Absolutely. Immortality is gifted to actors. We can spend time with them whenever we want. Coming nearly to the end now, we have the **Déjà vu Award** for best fantasy movie, which is...

Z: The Neon Demon??? I'm confused.

J: How can this film win best fantasy and also most pretentious fantasy? Because this was deliberately pretentious, and resulted in a divisive movie that I just happened to appreciate very much. It's super-stylishly shot, with great performances and a great soundtrack. It explores the horror of manufactured beauty, and is a very thoughtful film. It's not for everyone (hence its box office trip to oblivion), but if it grabs you it will grab you hard (please give me credit for resisting a cheap shot at Donald J. Trump or Bryan Singer here). Now we come to a close with the **No Yul Brynner Who Was Bald But Not Ben Kingsley Award** for outstanding new TV series. Which is...

Z: Westworld. Ohh... cowboy robots!

J: Turns out **Westworld** delivered so much more than that. The novel by Michael Crichton was a classic. The Brynner movie was a classic. That this series could in many ways surpass both has been a true revelation. The complex characters, the deep subject matter, the setting, and the superb cast deliver a theme park on the edge of something much more interesting than a mechanical breakdown. Add into the mix a soundtrack peppered with piano cover versions of modern rock songs, and the result is pure genius. Well, that is it for another year. Say goodbye, Zombaby.

Z: Goodbye Zombaby! [Giggles and waves]

J: That gag went out with Ben Kingsley's career...

"be a hugger - not a biter!"
Love Zack
The Zombaby

Jordan Royce can be contacted at **jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com** and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International – **www.fabradiointernational.com** also available from iTunes as a Podcast

Zack The Zombaby lives in a house full of toys and games with his Mummy, Daddy and Nocturna The Vambaby. He helps out at STARBURST for his pocket money.
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Be careful, Zombaby. Some out of work saddo is trying to steal your gig!

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